

THE
Athanasian Creed

RE-EXAMINED

Upon PRINCIPLES of



Sober Reason and Scripture,

AND UPON

A NEW PLAN of Enquiry :

In several LETTERS to a *doubting* Friend.

Published on occasion of some late *Debates*, in order to
give *full* and *final Satisfaction* upon the Subject.

By a CLERGYMAN of the Church of ENGLAND,
desirous to promote Truth and Peace, and to rectify
any Error upon fair Conviction.

L O N D O N :

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A P R A Y E R.

“ LORD, let no unseasonable *stiffness* of those that are in the *right*, no perverse *obstinacy* of those that are in the *wrong*, hinder the closing of our *wounds*; but let the *one* instruct in *Meekness*, and be thou pleased to give the *other*, *Repentance* to the acknowledgment of the *Truth*. To this end, do thou, O Lord, *mollify* all *exasperated minds*; take off all *animosities* and *prejudices*, *contempt*, and *heart-burnings*; and by uniting their *Hearts*, prepare for the *reconciling* their *Opinions*. And, that nothing may interrupt the *clear sight* of *thy Truth*, Lord, let all *private* and *secular* designs be totally deposited; that *Gain* may no longer be the measure of our *Godliness*, but that the *one great* and common concernment of *Truth* and *Peace*, may be *unanimously* and *vigorously* pursued. And do thou so *guide* and *prosper* all PACIFICK ENDEAVOURS, that those *happy*, *primitive* days, may at length revert, wherein VICE WAS THE ONLY HERESY.”

Dr. Hammond.

E R R A T A.

PAGE 9. line 8. dele *for*. p. 13. l. 16. read *tho' they*.
 p. 15. l. 21. r. *to be*. p. 17. l. 1. for *the*, r. *his*.
 p. 24. l. 26. r. *one* another. l. 31. r. *set down*. p. 25.
 col. 1. l. 5. after *worshipped*, add *, p. 27. col. 1. r.
affirm. d. not two but one Christ; and add the follow-
 ing note, *Nestorius, inaudito scelere duos vult esse filios Dei,*
duos Christos. &c. Vin. Lirinensis; August. de hæres. p. 28.
 l. 1. r. *principle*. p. 34. l. 1. d. *some*. p. 36. marg. l. 6.
 r. *remarks*. p. 38. l. 13. for *it*, r. *in*. p. 40. l. 30. r.
of God. p. 79. l. 1. r. *in medio*. l. 3. r. *his own*. p. 90.
 marg. l. 10. r. *affect*. p. 92. marg. d. i. e. p. 94. marg.
 l. 20. after *Noetum*, add *Sect. 6*.

LETTER I.

SIR,

IN examining this creed, of which you seem to desire my thoughts upon the present occasion, I purpose to take a method somewhat different from what I find to have been hitherto the common one in discussing its contents. The common way has been, to oppose or defend it, in all its particular branches, according to the rules of disputation. I am not skilled in disputing, nor can I wade through the difficulties on either side; and shall therefore chuse a method that is both shorter and plainer, and, to me at least, more satisfactory.

This creed, I observe, places our final salvation, upon certain forms of expression, and modes of believing. I have been used, taking the Scripture for my guide, to consider this matter in another light. It doth not appear to me, that men's salvation depends upon niceties. Whether I am right or no in my opinion, you shall judge from what follows.

The sacred Scriptures constantly rest our salvation upon *great* and *plain* articles, both of belief and practice; and never, that I can find, descend to such intricate and minute particulars as are exhibited in this creed; much less insist that no man can be saved, who does not fully enter into them, or does not express his belief in such a dark ambages of words, as is there set

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forth

forth. The good God of heaven in revealing his will to men by his Son, undoubtedly had a regard to the meanest and most illiterate of his human creatures : And therefore, what he proposed for their belief and practice, in order to their salvation, must necessarily be plain, and suitable to their apprehension. Otherwise the great ends of his revelation must be lost upon far the most numerous part of mankind, and millions must perish, for want of learning and capacities : which, I profess seriously, I can no way believe. Dr. *Waterland* indeed says, in his critical history of this creed, *It is not pretended, that All are capable of seeing through every nicety, or of perceiving the full intent and aim of every part of this form, and what it alludes to.* But every part of this form, and every nicety therein, whether men can see through them or not, are in express terms, by the form itself, made necessary to the salvation of *All*. The Doctor, I perceive, is not of this mind. *I incline*, says he, *to the moderate opinion of those who think that the author does not lay the stress upon every little nicety of explication, but upon the main doctrine, &c.* Be this as it may for the present (for I will not now stand to debate it ;) yet I must confess that after all that has been suggested by this learned Doctor and others, I am not satisfied that God has given any authority to men, to *tamper* with what he has revealed, or to offer any *little nicety of explication*, in points not by himself explained, tho' they should afterwards say (which nevertheless the author of this creed has not done) that they *do not lay any stress upon such nicety*. Why can they not leave things of this kind, as God hath left them ? revealed in general, but not particularly

particularly explained; and, in effect, by themselves confessed to be inexplicable ^a; for they acknowledge the doctrine, in some parts of it at least, to be *incomprehensible*. If incomprehensible, how can it be explained? and how can the *vulgar* understand, what the most *learned* confesses to be above even their *own* understanding? Dr. Gregory wrote a treatise on purpose, as it should seem, to *caution* men against this piece of presumption. The title of it is, *The Doctrine of the glorious Trinity not explained, but asserted*. I will give you a short paragraph out of that learned and modest writer, taking the liberty to apply it to the case in hand, since I think it is justly applicable both to the creed itself, and to all other *nicety of explication* upon this great and awful subject. *It is too evident that these explications have not yet attained any happy success; and it is to be feared that they never will.* (Nay he says, and very truly, that they had done much *harm*; having *not only exposed this great Doctrine of the blessed Trinity to obloquies and contempt, but also occasioned hot*

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disputes,

^a Indeed we have been often told by some of these Gentlemen, especially during the strong debate upon this subject some years ago, that they do not pretend to *explain*, as neither, say they, does the Athanasian creed. But whoever looks into their writings, and accurately observes their conduct, will see that there is a degree of inconsistency in this profession, which some will be apt to consider as not much short of that whereby the Fathers at *Trent* did so remarkably distinguish themselves in their 13th session; where having declared, in their first chapter, that the manner of Christ's presence in the eucharist is *inexplicable*, yet (so soon did they forget themselves, even at the same fitting) they attempt in their fourth chapter, to *explain* the manner.

disputes, open contests, and bitter animosities, &c. But what I chiefly cite him for, is the following observation, which alone is a sufficient reason against this pernicious practice of making too free with such a subject, by nice explications.) *These explications of this Doctrine, were they never so convincing and satisfactory in themselves, and to learned persons; yet illiterate men, who are the far greater part of mankind, and do most need the plainest instructions, can never receive any benefit from them: for these explications being full of nice distinctions, and dressed up in logical, metaphysical and scholastick terms; unlearned men, who are perfect strangers to such hard notions, can never understand them*^b. And since Dr. Waterland himself confesses

^b Dr. Gregory observes farther, that some Divines by their *explications*, have unawares involved themselves in difficulties. For *endeavouring*, as he says, *to discover the manner how the three glorious Persons in the Trinity tho' they are but One God, do yet stand really distinguished from one another, they have, instead of maintaining the Trinity in Unity, opened a gap for Tritheism, the unhappy brood of John Philoponus.* The fact, I suppose, is well known, and we ought with this worthy man to lament it, and all other facts that are like it. You see how we are *lost*, when we go beyond the *Scriptures*. And the ill effects of our explications, reach a great deal farther than we are aware. Even the *Gentile* world take notice, and make their advantage of them; as we may see by this smart return of the *Malabarian* polytheists to the *Danish* missionaries, in their conference with them upon the subject of the Trinity. "I find," says one of them to the *Dane* (who had been explicating and unravelling, upon the foot of the common systems; I find) "that you with your *subtil* ways of arguing, can make a *Trinity* consist with *Unity*: And if your explication is

" absolutely

feſſes, *that all are not capable of ſeeing through every nicety* in this creed, may I not reaſonably aſk, Is it then neceſſary that all ſhould rehearſe it, and declare their *approbation* (as they virtually do by that rehearſal) of every ſuch nicety? Let this be conſidered at leiſure, and I may happen to touch upon it hereafter, if occaſion ſhall require. In the main while I proceed to what I principally deſigned in this Letter.

According to *my* apprehenſion, formed upon what I learn from the Scriptures, taken in their moſt plain and general intent, the ſalvation of of men's ſouls, does not depend upon the
doctrine

“ absolutely neceſſary to make others underſtand what
“ you mean, pray, allow *us* the ſame advantage of
“ explaining the doctrine of *our* religion, and putting
“ it in the moſt *favourable* light we can, for the ex-
“ cluding of the *abſurdities* imputed to us. This being
“ once granted, it will follow, that our *plurality* does
“ not deſtroy the *Unity* of God, any more than your
“ *Trinity* does.” *Confer.* N^o. ii. The *Malabarian* makes ſeveral other obſervations, with great acuteness and pertinence, which I do not chuſe to mention to you in a Letter, but may enlarge upon in converſation. It ſeems pretty plain to an *impartial* reader, that the *Dane*, building upon ſystems, laboured under difficulties which he could no ways get over; and that the Heathen gave a more conſiſtent account of his *Polytheiſm*, than the Chriſtian did of his *Trinity*. Thus the Chriſtian cauſe ſuffers by the means of *ſystematical explications*, and can never prevail univerſally, till the *Scriptures* are left free; which are in effect as much lock'd up by ſystems, as they are by the prohibitions againſt reading them in common languages. By the one the liberty of the learned is chiefly infringed; by the other, that of the unlearned: A liberty equally deſigned by God for the benefit of both, and for the advancement of his true religion.

doctrine of the Trinity, as particularized by some creeds, but upon the one great point of *embracing the Gospel, and living conformably to its rules*. This alone appears to me, to be necessary to salvation ; and I believe it to be all that God intended. The word of God nowhere tells me, you must believe an *Unity in Trinity, and a Trinity in Unity*, and all after a particular mode and manner of explication (as shall be expressed and set forth in some future creeds) or you cannot be saved. *But what saith it ? BELIEVE on the LORD JESUS CHRIST and thou shalt be saved* *. *REPENT ye, and believe the GOSPEL* †. *Except ye Repent, ye shall all PERISH* ‡. *Without HOLINESS no man shall see the Lord* **. And, to add no more declarations of this kind here, *Christ is become the author of eternal SALVATION to all that OBEY him* ††. These few declarations, in my humble opinion, contain the sum and substance of the Gospel ; and being interpreted according to a reasonable latitude, do sufficiently set forth the whole end and design of it : which comes in short to this : “ Jesus Christ, the blessed Son of God, came into the world to *save sinners*. This he does by calling them to repentance and amendment of life ; assuring them of pardon from God his Father, on such their return, and their hearty embracing the offers which he makes them ; taking him for their Saviour, and the only Mediator between God and men : for whom Christ died, to make reconciliation between both, and to procure an eternal inheritance to all that are sanctified, through faith in his Name.” ---- This, I think, fully expresses the general design of the Gospel-revelation, or the plain and comprehensive mean-
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Acts xvi. 31. † Mark i. 15. ‡ Luke xiii. 3, 5.
* Hebr. xii. 14. †† Hebr. v. 9.

ing of that great *Counsel of God* for the salvation of men, which *St. Paul* declared to the world, when he testified both to the *Jews* and also to the *Greeks*, *Repentance toward God, and Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ* *, exhorting men in all places where he preached, *that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for Repentance* †; which, in short, was the substance of his preaching. In these two words *Repentance* and *Faith*, duly explained and inculcated, consists the whole of our religion; and we may safely rest upon this grand foundation, which *God himself* hath laid: *Other foundation* than this, *can no MAN* lay, nor ought indeed to attempt. And it is, methinks, a case much to be lamented, that any set of men should by their laboured expositions and numberless refinements (so foreign to the design of the Gospel, and so little productive of real good) obscure and debase such a glorious scheme; *turning the grace of God into a lasciviousness* of invention, and *intruding into things which they have not seen*, nor can pretend to understand, without presuming to be *wise above what is written*.

I descend now to some particulars in the creed itself, first premising,

A short prelude or introduction.

In the infancy of Christianity some men, we find, insisted much upon the absolute necessity of certain peculiarities (unknown to the Gospel) in order to salvation; asserting, with great confi-

* Acts xx. 21.

† Chap. xxvi. 20.

dence, that none could be *saved*, who would not conform to those their favourite injunctions.

Thus,

Acts xv. i. Certain men that came down from *Judea*, taught the brethren and said, EXCEPT YE BE CIRCUMCISED *after the manner of Moses*, ye CANNOT BE SAVED.

Hear on the other hand, *the words of Truth and Soberness*.

I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing, [*his religion will be of no avail to you.*] Gal. v. 2.

Circumcision is nothing, and *Uncircumcision* is nothing, but the KEEPING OF THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD. 1 Cor. vii. 19.

In Christ Jesus neither *Circumcision* availeth any thing, nor *Uncircumcision*, but a NEW CREATURE, — but FAITH WHICH WORKETH BY LOVE. Gal. vi. 15. v. 6.

Before we go farther, let us reflect a little on these passages, and in so doing it will be natural to observe, (1.) That the being extremely positive for the damnation of men, who differ from us in regard to particular modes either of belief or practice, is no *new* thing. It seems to be of *Jewish* original. Nor should I have been sorry if it had ended, as it begun, with the *Jews* ^c. But *Christians* also, from very early

^c The *Jews*.] Who still continue in this malignity, and rather cherish than check the peccant humour; as appears even in their *Prayers*, those solemn ones which they call *Shemoneh Esreh*; in the 19th of which, *Buxtorf* tells us (and as may be also seen in Dean *Prideaux's* connection) they call for *everlasting destruction*

early times, have run into the same fatal uncharitableness, to the reproach of a Religion of the greatest goodness and benevolence. And what is somewhat remarkable, those are generally found to be the most positive for the *destruction* of their fellow-creatures, who have least considered the benevolent counsel of God, in the gospel-scheme, for for their *salvation*. (2.) That the Apostle, who had his commission and instruction immediately from heaven * setting himself in direct opposition to these unjust and uncharitable sentiments, places the great design of the Gospel, upon its right footing, and shews that the salvation of sinners, does not depend upon things of lesser moment (such as ceremonials and the like) but upon the grand points of *believing in Christ*, and *obeying his Laws*: Of *believing* in Him as the promised *Messiah*, and *Saviour* of Mankind; and of *obeying* his laws, by becoming *new men*, reformed in disposition and practice according to the spirit and precepts of the Gospel, and particularly according to that *Faith which worketh by Love*. These are the great things that are mainly insisted upon; and these *alone*, as we are assured by persons who should best know, will be accepted by God.

tion upon *hereticks*, and such as apostatize from the true religion, meaning their own. *Lexic. Talm.* in voce *Min.* Christians indeed are not so unrighteous in their *prayers*, but it is scarce more righteous to *anathematise* even in *creeds*.

* *Gal.* i. 12. *1-Cor.* xv. 3. *Eph.* iii. 3.

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Let

Let us now go on, as we proposed, to the
Creed.

1 "Whosoever will be *saved*, BEFORE ALL THINGS it is necessary that he hold the *Catholic Faith*." ^d ABOVE ALL THINGS have fervent CHARITY among yourselves, 1 Pet. iv. 8.

ABOVE ALL these THINGS put on CHARITY, which is the bond of perfectness; Col. iii. 14. Faith, Hope, Charity : ——— The GREATEST of these is CHARITY, 1 Cor. xiii. 13. The END of the Commandment is CHARITY, 1 Tim. i. 5.

You will observe here by the way the great stress laid upon *Charity* (or the sincere Love of God and Men) as being of the utmost importance in the Christian Institution, and comprizing in some sort the whole of its design. And it may deserve your more especial notice, that this admirable virtue is represented as *superior* to *Faith*, even to *Catholic Faith*; which can bear no comparison with *Catholic Charity*, the distinguishing characteristick, as it is one of the most amiable excellencies, of the religion of Christ.

^d *That is*, if I take the meaning right, *that he hold the Athanasian Creed*, and that in all its articles; for this seems to be the plain design of the words, notwithstanding the *moderate Opinion* mentioned by Dr. *Waterland* and others, which is justly supposed to be a *modern invention*, in order to defend in some sort what was found to be otherwise indefensible. For it may be shewn, upon occasion, that the ancients maintained *all the particulars* contained in this creed, and insisted upon their being all of the essence of faith, and consequently necessary to salvation.

Christ. No other pretensions of any kind, without this, are of any value. Even *Faith*, even the highest and the strongest Faith, without it, is of no account. *Though I have all Faith, so that I could remove Mountains, and have no Charity, I am nothing,* 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

But it will here perhaps be said (as it hath sometimes been) that *Before all things*, signifies *First of all* (*The first* thing necessary to salvation, is to *bold the catholick faith*.)-- Be it so: Hear what the Scripture saith on the other side.

The *Fear of the Lord* is the BEGINNING of Wisdom: a good Understanding have all they that Do his *Commandments*; Psal. cxi. 10. Prov. ix. 10.

Thou shalt *love* the LORD thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the FIRST and GREAT Commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself. On these two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets; Matth. xxii. 37, — 40.

Seek ye FIRST the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness. [*Now*] the Kingdom of God is — Righteousness, and Peace, and Joy in the Holy Ghost. He that in *These* Things serveth Christ, is *acceptable to God*, and *approved of Men*, Matth. vi. 33. Rom. xiv. 17, 18.

So that according to these declarations, the *faith catholick* (especially as it is dressed up, and very particularly insisted upon in the creed before us) does not seem to be the *first* thing necessary to salvation. If indeed by catholick faith were meant the *Gospel* or the *Christian Religion* (which is the only sense in which the words can be approved,

agreeably to scripture) I should readily acquiesce, and make no objection. But it is plain that *this* is not the meaning of them here.

2. “ Which faith except *every one* do keep whole and undefiled, *without doubt* he shall *perish everlastingly*. ” But,

Charity HOPETH all things. 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

My Sheep (or faithful servants (Hear my Voice, and they Follow Me, and I give unto them *Eternal Life* and

(ὅτι μὴ ἀπόλωνται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα) they shall NOT (shall in no wise) *perish everlastingly*; John x. 27. 28.

This is *Life Eternal*, that they might know thee the only True God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent, *John*, xvii. 3.

What shall I do to inherit *Eternal Life*? — Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. This do, and thou shalt *Live*; Luke x. 25, &c.

If thou wilt enter into *Life*, keep the *Commandments*; Matth. xix. 17.

Now what do these declarations principally insist upon? *Catholick Faith*? a *Trinity in Unity* and *Unity in Trinity*, according to all the various diversifications in the Athanasian creed? No: be pleased to read them once again, weighing them carefully in your mind, and considering them impartially, together with their contexts. The stress is chiefly laid, upon *obeying the will of God*, as delivered by his Prophets and Messengers

gers both under the old and new Dispensation, and particularly by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; who is the author of eternal salvation to all that *obey* him.

To these declarations, I think it proper to subjoin the following; which not only corroborate the former (were these indeed capable of any corroboration, being all of them the words of Christ himself, our highest authority) but express the *substance* of true religion in few and plain words, and that in so benevolent as well as comprehensive a manner, as ought to check in us at once every degree of uncharitableness, and every inclination to pass a harsh censure upon any of our fellow creatures, being pious and honest men, tho' *follow not with us*, and have not the happiness of being members of the same fold, and partakers in some privileges, which *we* may enjoy above *them*.

God hath shewed thee, O *Man*, what is *good*: and *what* doth the Lord require of thee, but to do *Justly*, and to love *Mercy*, and to walk *Humbly* with thy God? Micah vi. 8.

What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to *fear* the Lord thy God, to walk in all his *ways*; and to *love* him, and to *serve* the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy *soul*? Deut. x. 12.

Fear God and keep his *commandments*: for This is the whole Duty of Man; Eccles. xii. 13.

The grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, [or, as our margin renders it, *The Grace of God*, meaning his Gospel, *that bringeth salvation to all Men, hath appeared*] teaching us, that denying *Ungodliness* and *worldly Lusts*, we should live *Soberly*, *Righteously*, and *Godly* in this present World; looking for that blessed

bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our ſaviour Jeſus Chriſt, who gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all *Iniquity*, and purify to himſelf a peculiar people zealous of *good works*. Theſe things ſpeak and exhort. Theſe things are good and profitable unto Men. But fooliſh queſtions, contentions, &c. are unprofitable and vain. Tit. ii. 11, 15. Chap. iii. 8, 9. [ſee. 2 Tim. ii. 22, 23. &c.]

Let us here, my Friend, look back for a moment, and conſider. Is it not a bleſſing (and a moſt inſtimable one) to be thus *affured* of theſe great Truths by Revelation? If we had only *creeds*, eſpecially thoſe of later date, to inform and direct us; into what *notions* would they lead us, and in what *uncertainties* would they leave us, in regard to our ſalvation? But here, the terms of our ſalvation are fixed by almighty God, and are therefore (to our comfort be it ſpoken) unalterable by MEN. *They* cannot reſcind, what *He* hath decreed. The natural concluſion is; *Cleave to what God hath ſpoken*. You have his plain words before you: *Believe*, and *live*, according to *Them*; and you are *ſafe*.

I muſt here take notice (ſince it occurs accidentally to my thoughts in paſſing) that great ſtreſs hath been laid by ſome, upon thoſe words of our Lord, *He that believeth not, ſhall be damned*,* as if they referred immediately to the doctrine of the Trinity, and were a juſt foundation for condemning thoſe who do not aſſent to it as delivered in the modern forms.

A few obſervations will clear this point to the ſatisfaction of all unprejudiced minds.

To come at the true ſenſe of this declaration, it will be proper to compare it with ſome others of the like import; beginning with the Miniſtry of *John* the Baptiſt.

John

* Mark xvi. 16.

John (we are told) *baptized with the Baptism of Repentance* [and also preached that Baptism] *for the Remission of Sins, saying unto the people that they should Believe on Him who should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus; Acts* xix. 4, 5, *Mar.* i. 4. (see *Matth.* iii. 2.)-

Christ entering upon his Office, began his exhortations with these words; *Repent ye and believe the Gospel.* * And when he was about to leave the World, and ascend unto his Father, he told his Apostles, *That repentance and remission of Sins were to be preached in his Name among all Nations* † and at the same time gave them this commission, *Go ye into all the World, and preach the Gospel to every creature; immediately subjoining, He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned, Mar.* xvi. 15, 16.

The Apostle *St. Peter* opening this message, soon after, to the *Jews*, who inquired of him what they must do be saved, said, *Repent and be Baptized every one of you, in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. And they that gladly received his word, were baptized* accordingly. And upon another occasion, which soon followed, he exhorts them, *Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. For God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities, Acts* ii. 38, 41. and chap. iii. 19. 26.

These few passages being duly attended to, will easily lead us into the true meaning of the difficult texts which we have under view; so that we need not for the present look out for any others, tho' I may possibly find occasion to add some few more by and by.

Now

* *Mar.* i. 15. † *Luke* xxiv. 47.

Now in the passages that have been produced, you observe, Sir, in the first place, what it was that *John* Baptist preached ; *Repentance* of sins, and *Faith* in Christ the promised Messiah. And he administered *Baptism* to those who gave due evidence of repentance, *confessing their sins* †, which undoubtedly meant confessing them with sorrow, and with an intention to forsake them.

You observe, next that *Christ* insisted upon the *same* things, *Faith* and *Repentance*; instituting, *Baptism*, upon the foot of the New Covenant, in confirmation of both, and intending it (as *John's* Baptism also was intended, and was expressly declared to be) *for the remission of sins*.

You will observe, thirdly, the purport of *St. Peter's* preaching, *Repent and be converted : Repent and be baptized* : For what end ? *For the remission of sins*, or, *that your sins may be blotted out*. But where is *Faith* or believing ? You have it implied in these words, *Be baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ*. As also in the following, *They that gladly received his word*. Receiving his word, namely the Gospel that he preached, was *believing* it : And then immediately follows, that they who did so, *were baptized*.

Now lay all these observations together : you have then a clear and consistent view of the whole, and each passage will illustrate and confirm the other ; all of them, thus united, importing thus much : That the great design of the Gospel (and of *John's* ministry as preparatory to it) was to call men to repentance and amendment of life : That those who repented and believed, embracing the message of Salvation by Jesus Christ, as

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† Matth. iii. 6.

coming from God, were to be baptized into the name or into the profession of his religion, as taught by Him and his Apostles: And, that upon their doing this, which supposes that their Faith and Repentance were sincere, they were to obtain remission of their past sins.

Here you will take notice, that *Baptism* was never intended, nor is therefore at any time to be considered, as a mere *external rite*: it always implies *Repentance* and *Faith*, carrying *both* in the very idea of it, and having a close and inseparable connexion with each; insomuch that tho' you have them often joined, some two of them at least, if not also the third, yet, not unfrequently, you may observe only one or two of them set down, and the other (whether one or more) omitted. Sometimes, for instance, you find Baptism mentioned without Repentance, sometimes Repentance without Baptism, and sometimes Faith without either; and at other times some one of the former singly, without either of the other two; which seems to me plainly to imply, that all the *three* are intended, when any one of them is expressed, the terms being in some sort equivalent, or mutually expressive of one another; I mean, any one of them, tho' singly expressed, invariably and necessarily implying *both* the other. Thus, *What must I do to be saved? BELIEVE on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. REPENT and be CONVERTED. REPENT and be BAPTIZED. He that BELIEVETH and is BAPTIZED. BAPTISM doth now save us*: but then observe, that this Baptism is not merely *the putting away the filth of the flesh*, but intends chiefly *the answer of, or stipulation for, a good Conscience towards God*: As doth also that other declaration, *According to his mercy he saveth us by the*
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washing — but it is the washing of *Regeneration*, joined with the *renewing of the Holy Ghost*. Which agrees exactly with our Saviour's words, *Except a Man be born of Water, and of the Spirit, &c.* You have the intent of Baptism declared at once, and in the strongest terms, in the sixth of *Romans*; where it is shewn to be, in effect, and in its ultimate intention, *a dying to sin*, in conformity to Christ's death, and an engagement to *walk in newness of Life*. *How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?* For, *know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death?* &c. You cannot avoid observing here, and indeed through the whole chapter, if you please to have recourse to it, a Baptism to *Repentance* and new *Obedience*, connected with *Faith* in a crucified Saviour. Which is the very thing intended, uniformly alike, whenever you meet with Baptism, either expressed or implied, in any other passages.

Now when you consider Baptism in *this* light, in which the scripture constantly represents it, and wherein alone it teaches you to understand it, you cannot, I think, find it difficult, to come at the meaning of that declaration of our Lord, *He that believeth and is baptized, &c.* Join together the words of his *first* preaching, and of his *last* charge (*REPENT ye, and BELIEVE the Gospel: He that BELIEVETH and is BAPTIZED*) and the sense of the latter, in effect, and in its true intent, will be this: *He that BELIEVETH and REPENTETH*. Nor do I doubt but *Repentance*, tho' not expressed, is directly implied, in the subsequent words, *He that BELIEVETH not*: As if he had said; He that neither believeth nor repenteth, or rather, He that will not believe and repent, *viz.* at the preaching of the Gospel. When these two, *Re-*
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penitance and *Faith*, are secured, the things mainly intended are gained: and Baptism then comes in, in course, both opportunely and appositely in confirmation of both; not as a real addition to either (as of a thing in its nature and design distinct) but as a *seal* and *evidence* virtually including them, and as an open testimony to the world that we are now engaging to be Christ's disciples, resolving to continue in the profession of his religion, and to adorn it with a suitable practice, to the end of our days.— Thus you have the whole in one view, and the sense easy and clear, agreeable to the analogy and design of the Gospel.

I think it proper here to add, for your further satisfaction, if that be yet needful, the following observations; which may tend to remove any remaining difficulties, as well as to confirm what has been already offered.

Believing, in the passage before us, is evidently believing the *Gospel*. "Preach the Gospel: He that believeth," &c. The connexion is close, and nothing intervenes. Sometimes, *Believe in Jesus Christ*: The meaning the same: Believe in him as the *Messiah*: Believe the *Gospel* as revealed by him. No grounds at all here, no injunction in the least, for believing any thing further. This alone is sufficient: We may safely acquiesce in this; and we ought undoubtedly to acquiesce in it, if we would pay the regard that is due to the words of our Saviour and his Apostles, or unless we can judge it reasonable to pay a greater regard to human Creeds, than to the divine Oracles. But I purpose (if you give me leave) to clear this point farther in another Letter *, wherein I hope to make it evident, beyond all doubt or contra-

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* See Letter ii.

dition, that the Christian Faith consists in very few and plain articles, and these terminating at last in one single proposition, which comprehends the whole.

If you have any doubt about the word *believing*, it may soon be removed. Believing, I find, upon comparing passages, is a complex term, importing a *practical* belief, or an obedient *submission*, as well as cordial *assent*, to the Gospel-dispensation. Thus St. Paul interprets it. *Lord, who hath BELIEVED our report? They have not all OBEYED the Gospel*, Rom. x. 16. And when he says, in the next chapter, *They have not believed* (ἠπελθοντες) our margin rightly enough renders it, *They have not OBEYED*; this being a just and perhaps the only true sense of the word in this place; as it is also in another (viz. 1 Pet. iii. 20.) and is so rendered there by our translators. To which you may add that short contrast in the same epistle, chapter ii. 7. *Unto you who BELIEVE, he is precious; but unto them that are DISOBEDIENT, &c.* And finally, you will remember what was said above, that when St. Peter preached to the Jews, exhorting them to *repent and be baptized*; those who *GLADLY RECEIVED his word were baptized*; where you have again the true sense of believing, and that joined with baptism and repentance.

But is not *damned* (you will say) a hard word, when men cannot believe? *He that believeth not, shall be damned.* If indeed this disbelieving meant only an act of the understanding, or a simple determination of the judgment, in a case not sufficiently clear, or where the evidence was in some parts defective; or if it had referred to some abstruse points of doctrine (such as some of those, for instance, in the Athanasian Creed, or in any of the like human compositions, * I should readily acknowledge the justness of the enquiry.

enquiry. But you see that *this* is not the case, and that *disbelieving* means quite another thing, and consequently the *damnation* annexed to it, must be understood to be, *a just recompence of reward* inflicted upon the gainsayers, answerable to the great heinousness of the offence which they are guilty of. You will recollect the passages I have already offered; to which you may add the following, which will give the true notion of *disbelieving* at once. “ *Moses* truly said unto the Fathers, a *Prophet* shall the Lord your God raise up unto you, like unto Me: Him shall ye *bear* in all things, whatsoever he shall say unto you. Every Soul that will *Not Hear* that Prophet, shall be *Destroyed*.” They are words of St. *Peter*, Acts iii. 22, 23. where you see what is assigned by him as the *cause* of destruction or damnation; namely, *rejecting* the great Prophet of God, and his message from Him; turning a deaf ear to his instructions and exhortations; disregarding, neglecting and contemning them. To which those words of our Lord are in a manner parallel, shewing the nature of unbelief, and the real ground of condemnation, *viz.* “ He that *Rejecteth* Me, and *Receiveth Not My Words*, hath one that *judgeth* him: The *Word* (the Gospel) that I have spoken, the same shall *judge* (or condemn) him at the *Last Day* ; ” Joh. xii. 48. where you observe that our Saviour expressly characterizes *unbelief* under the terms of rejecting him, and not receiving his message: and the *unbelief* that he condemns, is abundantly illustrated by the perverse behaviour of the *Jews*, as recorded in the New Testament; so that we need no other comment upon those words of his, wherein he denounces *condemnation* upon unbelievers. For it is very evident, that the unbelief, upon which he passes that

that condemnation, has always in its composition a *perverseness of the will*, and a real *depravity of mind*; and that it is, in short, such a complication of *malicious obstinacy* and *irreclaimable impenitence*, as is in itself utterly condemnable.

I have dwelt the longer upon this difficult text (*He that believeth not, shall be damned*) in order to rescue it from misinterpretation on both sides; the misinterpretation, on the one hand, of those who would load it with inconsistencies, and fix upon it the odium of being too severe; and, on the other hand, of such narrow-minded persons, as would confine the sense of it to their particular Systems, and make it a foundation for the damnatory clauses in the Athanasian creed: which, you see plainly, have no manner of connexion with this text; and, if not with this, then I do not know where you will find any other in the whole Bible that will countenance them.

I will now sum up the sense of the whole in a short *paraphrase*, formed upon the foregoing reasonings and observations.

He that cordially embraceth the Gospel-revelation, and taketh upon him the profession and obligation of it by Baptism, continuing to profess and practise it with sincerity unto the end, the same shall be saved. On the other hand, he that disbelieveth, that is, rejecteth such gracious offers, despising or neglecting so great salvation, shall be condemned.

From the whole of this account, which I have given you, the following observation will at once occur; That the *Condemnation* intended by the *Gospel*, is founded upon very *different* principles, from those which we find set down in the *Athanasian creed*. In the one we have a set of *Notions* to be assented to; and without assenting to them,

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we are damned ; (I speak only of those parts of the creed, which are truly disputable, and have in all ages been disputed :) In the other we have *great* and *plain Truths* set forth to our view, which justly command our attention, and which are really in themselves of the utmost consequence to our Salvation. For they require us to submit to God, to close with his message, and obey it. This is the main intent of the whole : *Repent ye, and believe the Gospel* ; (or, Repent ye, and receive or embrace the Gospel.) A *practical Faith*, or a *faithful obedience*, is the thing principally insisted upon ; and that, not as singling out any particular parts either of belief or practice, much less as modified and refined by *Men* ; but extending to the whole complex of the Gospel, as revealed, and recommended, and enjoined by GOD. So that the charity and philanthropy of the Gospel, is much more extensive, as it is far more amiable, than that of the *Atbanasian Creed* ; and we can with much greater readiness and greater pleasure, join in the *benevolence* of the one, than we can in the *severity* of the other. The one is of GOD : And *God is Love* : The other is of Men ; and Men are less merciful than GOD. But *the Wrath of Men*, after all, *worketh not the Righteousness of GOD*.

You will observe also, by the way, the *meannefs* of the attempt, to bring down the great design of the *Gospel*, to abet the narrow purposes of *Creeds*. The *Gospel* is of a most benevolent nature ; but some *Creeds* are only the badges of a party. They were drawn up on purpose to make a distinction (not to say a variance) between Christians, where God intended none ; as was particularly the Creed now in view, which has done much harm in the World, by abridging
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the liberty, contracting the charity, and debasing the excellency, of the Gospel of Christ; notwithstanding its swelling pretensions of being founded upon that very Gospel; and how confidently soever its abettors may cry it up, as being the *great bulwark of genuine Christianity*. Far otherwise, you may be very sure.

Let us now proceed. You will remember that passage which gave occasion to this digression was, *which Faith, except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt, &c.* The words that next follow, are,

3. “ The *catholic Faith* [which is so to be kept *whole* and *undefiled*] **IS THIS.**

I would beg leave to observe, on the *other* side, that whatever may be the *catholic Faith*, as modelled, and as commonly dignified with that title by *Men* and *Fathers*; yet (which is of far more importance for us to know,)

PURE RELIGION and UNDEFILED before God and the Father (of all) **IS THIS:** to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world; Jam. i. 27.

THIS is his commandment, - that we *believe* on the Name of his Son *Jesus Christ*, and *love* another, as he gave us commandment; 1 John iii. 23.

And this seems to be abundantly sufficient for all the purposes of religion and salvation, as set own in the Gospel.

“ That we worship **ONE GOD** in *Trinity* and

To us there is but **ONE GOD** even the **TRINITY**

and TRINITY in UNITY." [-- The Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped.

FATHER ; and ONE LORD Jesus Christ ; 1 Cor. viii. 6. † There is *One God* and *One Mediator* between God and Men, the Man Christ Jesus ; 1. TIM. ii. 5.

* A very inquisitive and impartial writer, who over and over acknowledges the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, as being one with that of the Father, and allows also, or *thinks* at least (for so he speaks) that true Godhead is ascribed to the blessed *Spirit* of God in Scripture ; and further, that the reason of things sufficiently authorizes and allows religious or divine worship to be paid to him ; yet scruples not to own, that he *cannot find* we are *expressly required* to *worship* him [*i. e.* the holy *Spirit*] in any text of the Bible : (*Useful and important Questions*, &c. p. 162, 163.) Now let the case be as it will, which I must leave to be considered by others, I cannot help recollecting what Dr. *Felton* says in his viiith sermon at the Lady *Moyer's* lectures, p. 429. viz. "*We* [Protestants] can admit of *No Worship* that is not *taught* and *required* in the *Scriptures*." I must here also add, what I cannot observe without concern, in regard to the former of these two writers, that the author of the *Letter to Mr. Gbandler*, 1748. page 40. having his eye upon the very passage to which I have above referred, has done him manifest injustice ; and, I am afraid, not without knowing it. For the sense in the author is so extremely obvious, that he that reads may understand it. A good cause, like that of the letter-writer, did not, I think, stand in need of misrepresentations ; and surely they do no service to any cause.

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† See Mr. *Mede's* very judicious observations on this passage in his discourse on 2 Peter ii. 1. and Mr. *Lefley's* Case stated, p. 117, — 123.

That at [or in] the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in *Heaven* and things on *Earth*, and things under the *Earth*; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER; *Pbil.* ii. 10, 11. And let all the *Angels* of God worship him; *Heb.* i. 6.

4. "The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God.--- The Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord."

"We are forbidden by the *Scripture* Religion to say, There be three Gods or Three Lords."

One SPIRIT: One LORD: One GOD and Father of all; *Eph.* iv. 4, 5, 6.

The same SPIRIT, the same LORD, the same GOD, who worketh all in all; *1 Cor.* xii. 4, 5, 6.

"The Father is God, the Son God, and the Holy Ghost God; yet the Father is emphatically, *The One God.*" *Dr. Waterland's 2d Def. Qu.* ii.

5. "The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten."

Qy. 1. What is the distinction here intended, between made and created?

Qu. 2. Has any one ever imagined, that the *Mother* and *Creator* of all things, was himself made or created; or, that the *God and Father* of all, was begotten of any? By what name of
heresy

heresy was this heretical opinion (if ever it had a being) distinguished? or in what part of the world did it ever exist? If it never had any existence, why this notice taken, of what was never likely to enter into any man's head?

6. "So there is *One* Father, not *Three* Fathers; *One* Son, not *Three* Sons; *One* Holy Ghost, not *Three* Holy Ghosts. Not Two but *ONE* Christ."

Amazing! a *Christian* Creed: and a Creed against *particular* heresies. *What* heresy was ever so monstrous, as to affirm either of these *Negatives*?

7. "The Holy Ghost is of the Father, and of the Son, *proceeding*" [from both.]

By this declaration, and the subsequent Anathema's, the whole *Greek* Church stands condemned: which nevertheless hath always with great justice appealed from both, to the words of Christ, which are of greater authority, viz. *When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you FROM THE FATHER, even the Spirit of Truth, WHO PROCEEDETH FROM THE FATHER, he shall testify of Me.* Joh. xv. 26.

8. "None is *Afore* or *After* [the] other."

"The catholic Doctors (as Mr. *Nelson* assures us from Bp. *Bull*) have all taught, with one consent, that the *Son* hath the divine Nature *communicated* from the *Father*; who consequently * is the *Fountain*,

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* *Consequently, &c.*] You see these declarations drawn from the Fathers, do plainly authorize us if it (can

Original and Principal of the Divinity, which is in the Son." Life of Bp. Bull, p. 315.

9. "None is My Father (saith GREATER OR LESS Christ) is GREATER than another." than I; John. xiv. 28.
Vid. chap. x. 29.

"The catholick writers, both before and after the council of *Nice*, have unanimously declared

(can be supposed that the Fathers have any authority themselves in things of this kind) to argue and draw consequences from preceding propositions. *Quære* then, (but with all due reverence,) Does not the Father's communicating the divine nature to the Son, imply that the Father is pre-existent in that nature to the Son? Is not this also the meaning of the terms, *begotten*, *God of God*, &c. when applied to the Son? And are not the *Fountain*, *Original*, and *Principle*, to be understood as being *before* that which proceeds from them; as every *Cause* (humanly speaking) is prior to its effect? — But suppose it be said, that we have *no certain ideas* about these things, and consequently cannot argue upon them with any certainty? Agreed. Let us then leave them, as the *Scripture* has left them, and all will be well. — Yet here, by the way, it cannot escape observation, how *inconsistent* those persons are with themselves, who insist upon this objection. The objection is indeed a very just one in itself, but comes (I think) with an ill grace, from those who are here supposed to make it. You say, Sirs, that we have *no ideas* about such matters; yet argue as if we *had*; unless indeed you mean, that *others* have no ideas, and *you* have: Which I cannot imagine to be your meaning. For surely you would not *trifle* on so serious a subject. But is it not strange to say, that things are *incomprehensible*, and yet reason upon them as if they might be comprehended? This conduct itself seems to me incomprehensible; and one mystery is increased by another.

clared God the *Father* to be GREATER than the *Son*, even according to his *Divinity*; as being the *Author* and *Original*, &c. He who is *begotten*, is INFERIOR * to him who begets." Mr. *Nelson's Life of Bp. Bull*, p. 315, 334.

As the Father is greater than the Son, so is the Son greater than the Holy Ghost; and this according to the confession (whether an extorted one or no) both of ancients and moderns.

Si à Christo (says *Novatian* in particular, to name no others of the Ancients now) *accepit Paracletus quæ nunciet*, MAJOR ergo jam *Paracletus Christus est: quoniam nec Paracletus à Christo acciperet* [here also, in passing, you may observe reasonings and inferences] *nisi MINOR Christo esset. Minor autem Christo Paracletus, &c. De Trinit. c. 24.*

"He that sends (says also a modern authority of the greatest note) is for that very reason [N. B.] Greater than Him that is sent: And therefore I have not scrupled to admit, that the Son is Greater than the Holy Ghost? Dr. *Waterland's* 2 Def. Qu. ii.

10. "COETERNAL Who ONLY hath together and *coequal*. IMMORTALITY, 1 *Tim.* The Majesty *coeternal*." vi. 16.

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* The common distinction is, *Inferior* as to *Filiation*, but *equal* in *Nature*. The learned are better judges of this, than I can pretend to be; and therefore I leave it to them, contenting myself with what the *Gospel* has revealed. The simplicity as well as authority, in the one, is far more satisfactory to me, than the refined subtleties, and magisterial decisions of the other.

11. " God of the *substance* of the Father. Equal to the Father, *as touching his Godhead*. One not by *conversion of the Godhead into flesh*, but by *taking of the Manhood into God*. One altogether, not by *confusion of substance*, but by *unity of person*. "

Tho' we should suppose these definitions and distinctions to be ever so just, yet there is one objection to them, which is neither light nor little ; and that is, That *the Scripture is silent about such matters*. Where the Scripture is silent, we can affirm nothing. Definitions and distinctions are here out of place. They are *Additions of Men*, to the *revelations of God*.

12. " He therefore that will be *Saved*, must Thus think of the Trinity. "

Let us judge THIS rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to *fall*, in his Brother's way.

Him that is *weak in the faith*, receive ye, but not to *doubtful disputations* ; Rom. xiv. 1.

13. " THIS is the *catholick faith*, which except a man * believe faithfully, he CANNOT BE SAVED. "

But what faith the *Scripture* ? The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: THAT is the word of FAITH which WE preach, that if thou shalt *confess* with thy mouth the LORD JESUS, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God

* i. e. every man, as before.

God hath *raised* him from the *dead*, thou SHALT BE SAVED. For with the heart man *believeth* unto *righteousness*, and with the mouth *confession* is made unto SALVATION; Rom. x. 8, 9, 10.

I declare unto you the *Gospel* which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are SAVED :-- For I delivered unto you FIRST OF ALL --- how that Christ *died* for our sins --- and that he was buried, and that he *rose* again the third day according to the Scriptures.—So WE PREACH and so YE BELIEVED; 1 COR. XV. 1, 2, 3, 4, —II.

But there are some that *trouble* you, and would *pervert* the Gospel of Christ. But though WE or (even) an ANGEL from heaven, preach any OTHER GOSPEL unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be *accursed*.—For *other foundation* can no Man lay, than that is laid; which is Jesus Christ, [or, That Jesus is the Christ.] Gal. i. 7, 8. — 1 Cor. iii. 11.

Upon this last declaration of the Arianian Creed, I would offer *two* remarks; the first suggested by another person, in some strictures which he has published upon this Creed; the other, what naturally occurs to my own thoughts, on considering this declaration.

1. By *believing*, in this place (says my Author) the Creed means, *believing* and *professing*. For (as was observed a little before) *The right faith is*, that we *believe* and *confess*, &c. So that a Man cannot be saved, unless he believes and professes as this Creed directs him. But 1. *what if a Man cannot believe it?* Are we obliged, under the penalty of the loss of Salvation, to believe it, whether we can or no? Doth God require of any Man an *impossible condition*, in order to salvation?

vation ? 2. *What if it be against a Man's conscience to profess it ?* The Scripture saith, *whatsoever is not of Faith, is Sin.* If therefore a Man profess against his *conscience*, he *sins* ; and if, notwithstanding this, he must either *profess* or be *damned*, then God requires some men to *sin*, in order to their being *saved* : but this, we are sure, cannot be true ; and therefore the *menace* in this sentence is without ground." ——— *If the menace be, as this Author infers, without ground, I would beg leave to ask, How can that menace be pronounced, by those who believe it to be groundless ?*

2. As to what occurs to myself ; The conclusion of the creed of Pope *Pius*, I had almost said of Pope *Impius* (so abounding with heretical doctrines of the grossest kind) seems to have taken its pattern from hence ; tho', at the same time, modestly superadding the word *true*, to those numerous and manifest falsities. *This is the true catholic faith, without which NO MAN CAN BE SAVED.* What a condition (my dear Friend) should we be in, if our salvation were to lie at the mercy of creed-makers ! *Let us fall into the hand of God, and not of Man.* And it may also well concern us to take heed, as we profess ourselves *Protestants*, that that just tho' severe charge of our first protestant Archbishop against the *Papists*, do not fall upon ourselves. "*You would bind the rude and simple people, to believe, under peril of damnation, such things as they are not able to understand ; making articles of their faith to snare them, rather than to save them.*" Ans. to Gard. 395. And the same excellent Prelate (to whom we are infinitely obliged for his good services to our Reformation) hath shewn very clearly, what he judged to be true Religion, and sufficient

ent for eternal happineſs, by theſe words in the dedication of his celebrated *Catechiſm* to K. *Edw.* vi. publiſhed in 1548. “Doutles in theſe three pointes [the “commaunderments of almyghtye “God, *thartycles* of the *Chriſtian faith*, and “the *Lord's prayer*] is ſhortlye and playnlye “included the *neceſſarye knowledge*, of the whole “*ſumme of Chriſtes religion*, and of all thynges “appertaynyng unto *everlaſtyng Lyfe*.”

I have now examined this creed as far as I intend at this time; and ſhall detain you but a little while longer, before I diſengage you from the preſent trouble.

What I have to offer in the remaining part of this Letter, is as follows.

In the firſt place, I hope there can be no juſt objection to the *application* that I have made of Scripture paſſages on this occaſion. For they fully answer the purpoſe for which I have produced them: which was, to ſhew upon *what* great points the *Scripture* lays the main ſtreſs, in contradinction to thoſe nicer articles which this creed ſets forth as the teſts of orthodoxy, and the criterions of damnation. Of this at leaſt I can be very ſure; that theſe paſſages are far more applicable to the deſign in hand, than many of thoſe which we commonly ſee alledged to ſupport ſome of the tenets in this creed; ſuch as, for inſtance, *He that believeth not, ſhall be damned*, to countenance the damnatory ſentences. *Unto the King eternal, immortal, inviſible, &c.* to prove the propoſition, “The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghoſt eternal:” *Tous there is but one God --- And one Lord Jeſus Chriſt, &c.* to confirm the declaration, “Who although he be God and “Man, yet is not two, but one “Chriſt”: With many other citations of this ſort,

some which either have no reference to the points for which they are alledged, or at least can never establish those peculiarities of doctrine in some points, which seem so inconsistent with the grand design of the Scriptures, as well as with their clearest and most repeated declarations. All which, you see, terminate in a few plain propositions relating to *belief* and *practice*, and give you at once a just notion of what God requires of you in order to salvation.

And for this reason I must, in the next place, earnestly recommend to you a careful *Study* of these sacred pages: Which being duly attended to, and thoroughly considered, will enlighten your understanding, enlarge your knowledge, and settle your judgment, in regard to any religious notions founded upon human systems, or countenanced by human authorities. But, which is a further and very special recommendation of these divine writings, they will enlarge your *charity*, where systems and some creeds would contract it. They will teach you to consider mankind as such, and will in a particular manner caution you to be upon your guard against passing a *rash judgment* upon your fellow-christians, and to forbear condemning those whom God doth *not* condemn; nor will by any means allow you to say, with the blind devotees of the Church of Rome, *all heresies condemned, rejected, and cursed by the Church, I likewise reject, condemn, and curse*. For being well acquainted with the Scriptures, you will soon discern that the charge of *heresy* is in most cases as groundless as it is impotent; and that so long as your fellow-christians, of whatever denomination, believe the *Scriptures*, and endeavour to believe them in their true sense, they need not be at all
uneasy

uneasy under such a charge, but may justly say, upon the foundation of a good conscience, and of a sure trust in God, *After the way which you (dividers of Christian love, and disturbers of Christian peace) call heresy, so worship We the God of our fathers, believing all things that are written, both in the Old Testament and in the New. And as to cursing any man, or any body of men, for their opinions, you will be taught better things by the Scripture, even to judge favourable in all cases where you can, and to be more free to bless than to curse Men, made after the similitude of God: And if those men should be (as for any thing you know they may be) very honest and good men; how can you curse, whom God hath not cursed; or devote to destruction, those whom he may save? You will remember, there is One Law-giver, who alone is able to save and to destroy; and will therefore judge nothing of this kind before the time, until the Lord come. You will remember particularly our Saviour's caution (a caution of the greatest moment to be attended to by every one of us;) Judge not, that ye be not judged: Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned. And pray, why should you judge? Or upon what authority can you condemn? Who art thou that judgest another? Yea, that judgest Another's servant? To his OWN Master he standeth or falleth. Therefore thou art inexcusable, O MAN, whosoever thou art that judgest.*

3. Since the compiler of this creed has thought fit to pass the sentence of condemnation upon those who cannot assent to it, I must take the liberty to remonstrate a little upon his arbitrary proceedings, and to call in question the authority

upon which the sentence is pronounced. I can no way approve of so great freedom taken in a creed, nor help wishing that the author had understood Christianity better than he appears to have done; which if he had, he would. I am persuaded, have been less peremptory in his opinion, and more charitable in his sentence. As to which, I may well say, with the modest and judicious Bp. Taylor, "It had not been *amiss*, if the *final judgment* had been left to JESUS CHRIST ^a:" which now seems to be extorted out of his hands, and lodged in the hands even of the most ignorant of the vulgar, all being enjoined to pronounce the anathema, tho' they neither understand any thing of the matter, nor can give any other reason for their being so severe upon others, besides their being commanded to act after this manner. In which case it is evident, that their obedience is, like their faith, *implicit*; both depending upon human authority, more than upon divine: which yet is a conduct by no means agreeable to the principles of our *Reformation*.

Those words of the very humane and pious Prelate before-mentioned, deserve surely to be a little more attended to, than they have commonly been; for they are really of great concern. *I confess I cannot see that moderate sentence and gentleness of charity, in the preface and conclusion of that creed, (which I, presume to add, is agreeable to the gentle spirit and benevolence of the Gospel.) Nothing there but Damnation b* and

^a Lib. prophet: Sect. ii. No. 36.

^b "Damnation, eternal Damnation, is placed with all its horror before our eyes; and we are so terrified at the prospect, that Fear makes us imagine, we comprehend *Mysteries*," &c. Which words of Lord Orrery (in his Remark on dean Swift) are but too applicable to the present case.

and perishing everlastingly, unless the article of the Trinity be believed, as it is there with curiosity and minute particularities explained. As for the Articles themselves, says he, tho' I am most heartily persuaded of the truth of them (as there can be no question but he was) yet I DARE NOT SAY all that are not so, are irrevocably damned. By which last words it should seem, that this good Man could not conscientiously pronounce those sentences of condemnation. Whether it was his custom to pass them over in *silence*, when they were read in publick, I have not heard.

If I find that what I have written in this Letter, shall have given you any satisfaction, or at least that it has not displeased you, I shall be ready, upon the least intimation, to proceed farther upon the subject.

LETTER

LETTER II.

SIR,

SINCE you are so far from disapproving of what I sent you lately, that you desire and even press me to go on with the subject, urging some reasons which I cannot but acknowledge have affected me not a little; I have upon these intimations enlarged my design, and shall with the greater pleasure endeavour to execute it, as I hope thereby not only to oblige *You*, but also in some measure to benefit *Others*. For, as you rightly observe, *There can be no greater service done to true Religion, than to set it forth in its true light*; and, let me add, to remove as much as possible all prejudices against it.

In my former Letter I occasionally mentioned my design to illustrate one great article of the Christian Religion, which, as I take it, is of very high importance in the present case, and will, when rightly explained, remove all difficulties, wherein our minds may have been entangled by the *Athanasian Creed*. I am now going to engage in that design. And since this Letter has a close connexion with some of the main parts of the former, you may consider it as a kind of *Supplement* to what I have there offered, and did then promise to support at farther leisure.

St.

St. *John* tells us, towards the conclusion of his Gospel, *These things are written, that ye may believe that JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, and that believing ye might have LIFE through His name* ^a These words, you see, rest our Salvation wholly upon our believing this one point, *That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*. Those that believe this, in its true sense, shall have *Life* (everlasting life undoubtedly is meant) *thro' His Name*. Now if we can but be so happy as to find out the true and full sense of this declaration, we need inquire no further. All scruples vanish, and our business is at an end. No matter what any Creeds or any Commentators say in this case. *To the Law and to the Testimony: If any of them speak not according to This Word, it is because there is no light in them* ^b: Nor are they therefore to be depended upon or regarded in so great an affair as that of Salvation. For from the *written Word* there can be no appeal. By the sentence which *This* delivers, we must abide; and by *This* alone must our fate be determined.

One of our Commentators, a person of great integrity and piety, giving his sense of these words, has the following note. *The great point concerning Christ to be known and believed from the Scriptures, is this: That Jesus is the promised Messiah, the anointed of the Father, he in whom all the types and shadows of the Law are accomplished*. All this is right, and gives us the true sense of the words. And here our Commentator

^a *John* xx. 31. Some have supposed, upon very good reasons, that St. *John* ended his Gospel with these words.

^b *Isai.* viii. 20.

tator might very well have stopped: For every doctrine and precept of the Gospel, that is necessarily connected with this (as all and every one of them most certainly are) would have followed in course; and every honest and sensible man that searches the Scriptures with attention, would with ease discern, and with readiness acknowledge, the necessary connection. But this worthy person (having been bred up at first, as most men are, in human systems) not content with the true and plain sense which he had given us of the words, proceeds to those common super-additions of abstruse and unscriptural terms, which have passed so long for orthodox in the Christian World. For thus he goes on: *And that this Jesus is for Nature coessential, for Dignity coequal, and, for Duration coeternal with the Father.* Whether this be true or no, which doth not concern my present inquiry, I would beg leave to ask, How doth the supposed truth of it appear from *this* passage? An expositor, I think, has no more to do, than to give the sense of the passage before him, as the design and connexion shall require, illustrating and confirming that sense with parallel passages from other places; which is very allowable, and very commendable, where the parallels are just. But no expositor, surely, should go further than this; lest he be found in the end to *add* to the Word God (c) or at least to say more than that Word will warrant. Which is very often the case, where men are governed by systems, tho' the things alledged from them be no way to the purpose with regard to the point in view, but rather lead us from it, and involve our ideas in confusion

confusion. This I take to be the case here; and I cannot but lament to find it so. For I have a great regard for the author, as one of the best of men.

Peace be to his ashes, and prosperity to all the pious and more judicious parts of his work. I here leave him for a while, and proceed to give you the *genuine* sense of the passage, by comparing it with other passages that have the same view and intent; yet not depending upon my own judgment only, but taking in the assistance of two excellent men, whose penetration and discernment I am sure you will not dispute, and whose integrity and love of truth is obvious to all who are acquainted with their writings.

The first is Mr. *Locke*, tho' he hath said but little in comparison upon this particular passage. His remark upon it however being a very just one, and pertinent to our present purpose, may serve as a short introduction to what I intend to give you more at large from the other.

“ What St. *John* (says he) thought necessary and sufficient to be *believed*, for the attainment of eternal life, he here tells us. And this, not in the first dawning of the Gospel; when, perhaps, some will be apt to think, less was required to be believed, than after the doctrine of faith, and mystery of salvation, was more fully explained in the Epistles written by the Apostles. For it is to be remembered, that St. *John* says this, not as soon as Christ was ascended: For these words, with the rest of St. *John's* Gospel, were not written till many years not only after the other Gospels, and St. *Luke's* history of the *Acts*; but in all appearance after all the Epistles written by the other Apostles. So that above

threescore years after our Saviour's passion (for so long after it, both *Epiphanius* and *St. Jerome* assure us this Gospel was written) *St. John* knew nothing else required to be believed for the attainment of Life, but that *Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.*"

After this remark, he proceeds to obviate an objection, which he foresaw would be made to it, from the quarter of what is commonly called *systematical divinity*. I believe you will not be displeased, nor think it an improper addition, if I here subjoin his reasonings with the abettors of that (which I would take the liberty to call) occult science.

To this, *says he*, 'tis likely, it will be objected by some, that to believe only that *Jesus of Nazareth* is the *Messiah*, is but an *historical*, and not a justifying or saving faith. To which I answer, that I allow the makers of systems and their followers, to invent and use what distinctions they please; and to call things by what names they think fit. But I cannot allow to them, or to any man, an authority to make a *Religion* for Me, or to alter that which God hath revealed. And if they please to call the believing that which our Saviour and his Apostles preached and proposed alone to be believed, an *historical* faith, they have their liberty. But they must have a care how they deny it to be a *justifying* * or saving

* " Those who have been curious to enquire into these matters, have reckoned up at least *twenty* several opinions among the Protestants concerning *justifying faith*. I do not desire to acquaint myself with those differences: he that would know what *justification* and *justifying faith* are, shall sooner come to understand the nature of them, by *diligent reading of the Scripture*, than
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ing faith, when our Saviour and his Apostles have declared it so to be, and taught no other which man should receive, and whereby they should be made Believers unto eternal Life; unless they can so far make bold with our Saviour, for the sake of their beloved systems, as to say, that he forgot what he came into the world for; and that he and his Apostles did not instruct people right in the way and mysteries of Salvation. For that *this* is the sole doctrine pressed and required to be believed in the whole tenor of our Saviour's and his Apostles preaching, we have shewed (*he means in his Reasonableness of Christianity, from whence I take this passage*) through the whole history of the Evangelists and the *Acts*. And I challenge them to shew that there was any *other* doctrine, upon their assent to which, or disbelief of it, men were pronounced *Believers*, or *Unbelievers*; and accordingly received into the Church of Christ, as members of his body, as far as meer believing could make them so, or else kept out of it. *This* was the *only* Gospel - article of faith

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by reading over all the *controversial writings* of Divines about them; and if men would but content themselves with those *plain* and *simple* descriptions, which the *Scripture* gives us of *faith*, there could not be any great difference about it: This would cut off most of those disputes which have been commenced upon metaphors, and figurative speeches. — To bring the business out of the clouds; ——— *Faith* signifies the, *whole of Christian Religion*, viz. such an effectual assent to the revelation of the Gospel, as doth produce repentance, and sincere obedience, and a trust and confidence in Christ alone for salvation." *Archbp. Tillotson's second and third sermons on this text*, viz. *John* xx. 31.

which was preached to them. And if nothing else was preached every where, the Apostle's argument will hold against any *other* articles of faith to be believed under the Gospel; *Rom. x. 14. How shall they believe that whereof they have not heard?* For to preach any other doctrines necessary to be believed, we do not find that any body was sent."

You see his clear, easy and cogent manner of reasoning with builders of systems, and their obsequious followers: Who, because he unsettled their old foundations, and led men to the *Gospel* only for Gospel-truths, could never forgive him, nor can to this day. For what becomes at this rate, of their systems? They are gone. But these must not be given up, on any terms; and therefore the restorer of the first plain evangelical truth, tho' it be far more valuable as it is more ancient than systems, must be opposed and vilified. But he was a good as well as a great man, and has done more towards illustrating the Epistles of *St. Paul*, and giving us the true sense of them, than all our system-mongers put together, with all the commentators too, not excepting even the Fathers. And such was his deep sense of the inestimable mercies of the Gospel, that the night before he died (as I have it in a private Letter from a Friend) *he heartily thanked God, as for all his goodness and mercies to him, so above all for his redemption of him by Jesus Christ.*

The other great man, whose illustrations I shall here chiefly build upon, is the most learned and accurate Professor *Limberch* (Mr. *Locke's* intimate Friend) who perhaps understood the Scriptures the best of any man of the last or present age, having compared them in all their parts with the greatest exactness, and giving us a most
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rational and most amiable sense of them (and what I am persuaded is the *true* sense) in his comments upon the *Acts* of the Apostles, and on the Epistles to the *Romans* and to the *Hebrews* * a volume, in my opinion, worth its weight in gold to lovers of the Christian Religion, and such as would see it in its true light, as delivered in its first simplicity in those sacred books. For this Writer, in order to come at the sense of them, does not seek for it from systems or pre-conceived opinions of any sort (which would only have cramped his thoughts, and laid an embargo upon his judgment) but follows the divine Writers as they naturally lead him, step by step. into their true meaning; aiming at no more than what they themselves teach him, nor delivering any other sense but what he finds immediately contained in the passages before him: Which sense he at the same time delivers with sufficient freedom, and yet with all the candor and decency that becomes a Christian Divine: The just character, I think, of an honest and wise interpreter of Scripture. If we would all of us read the Scriptures more, and systems less, and had the ability as well as honesty of this Man to qualify us for tracing out their sense, the Christian Religion would appear amiable in our eyes; rational, clear, convincing; consistent in its parts; and useful in its whole design; a Religion in short from God. If you have not yet read these incomparable pieces of Mr. *Limborch*, you have a pleasure, let me tell you, still to come, and I would advise you by all means to read them. From these I intend to draw out, and
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^a Printed at *Rotterdam*, by authority from the States of *Holland*, 1711. fol.

connect in the best manner I can, what I shall find to the present purpose, having my eye chiefly upon his comment on the *Acts*, and interspersing where I shall see proper some few observations of my own, as well as adapting the whole to the familiar style of a Letter.

First, he observes in general, upon a particular occasion given him to make this remark, That the Christian Doctrine at the beginning, was not loaded with all those controversial opinions, with which the Councils of succeeding ages have rendered it so operose and intricate. This doctrine was then exceedingly simple, plain and perspicuous, being contained in this short and single proposition (which shall be more largely explained hereafter) *That Jesus, who was crucified by the Jews, was the Christ, or Messiah.*

Let me here interpose for a moment. Would you have thought (if you had been conversant only in our received systems) that the assent to this single proposition, had been reckoned then sufficient? Few of our moderns, accustomed to a multiplicity of articles, and seemingly more fond of their number than of their solidity, would, I imagine, be content with this. They would raise cavils, and be at once in an heat. Yet the Apostles, as I hope to shew you by degrees, were content with this, and insisted upon no more from any that were willing to enlist themselves in the Christian profession.

With regard to their sentiments and conduct, formed upon the instructions they had received from their divine Teacher and Lawgiver, who taught the same doctrine, take, in the first place, the case of the Jaylor. Sirs, said he to *Paul* and *Silas*, *what must I do to be saved?* They answer,

answer, *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.* As to the Jaylor's question to them, it plainly implies a readiness to comply with whatever they should direct him to do; and that readiness presupposes his being fully persuaded of their divine mission. And with regard to the *answer*, tho' it be a very short, yet is it at the same time a very comprehensive one. For it contains every thing that is intended in the office of a Saviour, and every point of belief which the Gospel any where requires as necessary to salvation, tho' represented under different forms of expression, in different places, and on different occasions. The sense of the words here indeed, is only this: *Believe that Jesus is the Christ, or the promised Messiah and Saviour.* But then, such a belief, I must observe, implies in it a belief also of his whole *doctrine*, and of the *confirmation* given to it, both by his miracles, and death, and resurrection, and exaltation to the right hand of his Father in heaven; by all which his priesthood and kingdom are no less confirmed. Now since these cannot be separated, and since by admitting any one of them, you take all the rest in course along with it, for this plain reason it is, that you have the object of saving faith proposed to you by the Apostles, sometimes under one idea or character, (or if you prefer the expression, under one act of the divine will) and sometimes under another. *e. g.* You are required to believe, *That God hath raised Jesus from the dead.* When you believe this, you cannot but believe also, that Jesus is the Christ or Saviour, the Prophet and Messenger of God, whose message God confirmed by such a miracle. Again—*That*
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God hath exalted Him with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins: This likewise is of the the same import, and leads you to the same conclusion; with many other like phrases or declarations whereby the object of our faith is set forth in Scripture: All of which, when taken together, will be found to terminate in this one assertion, *viz.* That the same Jesus who lived and taught in Judea, who was famed for his miracles, who was crucified, who rose again the third day, and at last ascended into heaven, is the Christ the Saviour of the world. Now this faith, in its complex view and intent, necessarily includes in it Obedience to Christ's commands, and a sure trust of obtaining salvation through Him; since it is upon the persuasion of his being the *Christ*, that we undertake to obey him. For he who acknowledges his resurrection from the dead, must at the same time acknowledge his veracity, and that God gave the strongest testimony to his doctrine, by a miracle superior to all exception. For which reason he receives his doctrine, professes himself his disciple, and submits himself to his direction. When therefore the Apostles require, that we should *believe on the Lord Jesus*, or believe *that Jesus is the Christ*, they thereby require, not only that we cordially assent to, and openly profess this great truth, but also that together with it we embrace the *whole* doctrine of Christ, profess ourselves his followers, and perform all those things which he requires at our hands, in order to our acceptance and salvation.

From hence you see, by the way, how little ground there is, either for the objection that has been commonly made to this great article, as if
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it were insufficient (tho' it be the main postulatam, the very cardinal point insisted upon by Christ and his Apostles, for the admission particularly of the Jews * into his service ;) or for the clamors that have been raised against Mr. *Locke* and several other excellent persons, for asserting and confirming this article from Scripture. The objection and the clamours seem to me to be founded only upon systematical prejudice ; a prejudice of all others perhaps the worst ; and of which I will venture to say, that it not only too much resembles the prejudice of the Jews, but is one of the main obstacles to the progress of Christianity.

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* As to the *Gentiles*, the case was different, and accordingly the application made to them, at the first preaching of the Gospel among them, was different also. As they knew not the Old Testament, it was never mentioned to them, but the arguments were drawn from other topicks, suitable to their rational nature only, and founded merely upon facts, of which they themselves could judge according to the evidences given them. With regard to Christians or Believers of revelation, whether more lately converted to the Faith, or born of Christian parents, and by them taught that Faith (*i. e.* the doctrine and morals of Christianity) these, being supposed to have the Bible in their hands, or at least to hear it, and have it explained to them, are in this respect upon the same footing with the Jews. To them the argument may justly be fetched from Prophecy, as well as from other topicks. And this accounts for the Apostles applying, as they sometimes do on this head, to their Gentile converts ; especially St. Paul in his Epistles. For he was chiefly and more immediately the *Apostle of the Gentiles* ; an Apostle first to convert them, and afterwards to exhort them to continue in the Faith.

I would offer another remark or two before I pass forward. Had the doctrine contained in this great article been rightly understood in former times, especially in the last century, and more particularly here in England; what a vast cloud of learned dust, raised by the controversy, about *Faith* and *Works*, and what great divisions and animosities following thereupon, might easily have been prevented? For after all, when we come to see this matter in its true light, the controversy appears to have no foundation in Scripture. Had the controvertists but entered into the right meaning of this one proposition, *Jesus is the Christ*, all their labour, and all their loss of temper towards each other in maintaining this quarrel of their own fancies, might have been saved.

And lastly, Had the insidious author of *Christianity not founded upon argument*, permitted Christianity to stand upon its *own* bottom, he would have had nothing to object to it; but having dressed it up in that fantastic garb wherein he found that some enthusiasts had exhibited it to the world (a proper memento, I should think, to such people) he endeavoured to expose it as a Religion void of Reason. All I shall say upon the occasion is this; Let this Religion be suffered to remain upon that foundation, and that alone, in which Christ settled it, and his Apostles left it, and it can never be moved.

These few remarks only in passing. I will now return to my subject, and endeavour to illustrate and confirm this point from another instance; adding some observations, for the honour of the Christian Religion, and for its further progress in the world, as it is delivered
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to us with purity and simplicity in the sacred writings.

Let us attend therefore, next, to what passed between *Philip* and the *Eunuch*, Acts viii. This man (the Eunuch) after proper instruction, as far as the time would admit, in the main points relating to the Messiah, was desirous to be baptized. He thereupon asks Philip, *What doth hinder me (after this instruction, and my assent) to be baptized?* Philip answers, *If thou believest with a l thine heart, thou mayest.* The Eunuch replied, *I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God;* or the promised Messiah. What follows upon this declaration? *Philip baptized him.*

Now let us form our observations upon this passage. We have here, in few words, the sum and substance of the Christian Religion delivered by the Ethiopian that had been instructed in it by St. Philip: *I believe that Jesus is the Son of God.* This declaration was sufficient for baptism, or for admission into the Christian Church. And this also shews us, by the way, what it is to be *baptized into the name of Christ*; an expression which we meet with more than once in this book of the *Acts*, and which, since some expositors have obscured it with their fancies, may deserve to be explained. To be baptized into the name of Christ, is to be baptized into the faith of him as of the Saviour that had been promised; whom the ancient prophecies styled the Messiah or Christ. And this, let me here add, means the very same thing, as being baptized into the name of *the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*. For thus stands the case, in its due connexion. To be baptized into the name of these three, is to be engaged and consecrated to

their service ; or to oblige ourselves to the observance of the doctrine and precepts delivered to us by the Son, in the name and by the order of the Father, and powerfully confirmed to us by the Holy Ghost. Those therefore who profess their belief in Jesus, and are baptized into his name (as this Eunuch certainly was ; for he was baptized upon his declaring that he believed Him to be the Messiah ; — those who are thus baptized) do, by their baptism, in effect declare, that they devote themselves to Christ and his doctrine : To *Christ* as their Governor, and *the great Shepherd of their Souls* : To his *doctrine* as taught by Him, in virtue of that commission which he had received from his Father, and which had been miraculously confirmed by the Holy Spirit. So that Baptism, upon the whole, includes in it the sum total of the Christian Religion, as Circumcision included in it the entire Jewish Dispensation * : And consequently, when the Eunuch was baptized upon his professing to believe that Jesus was the Christ, it shews, first, that this was the principal profession required, in regard to belief ; and, next, that he engaged himself to an *Obedience* answerable to that belief and profession. Which is or ought to be the case of all that are baptized ; nor should more be required of any.

Let us now go on with our observations. Believing *that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*, is expressed by a variety of terms, all concurring in the same sense. *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.* — *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the*

* Gal. v. 3.

dead, thou shalt be saved. — Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God. — Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. — Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God. — Who is he that overcometh the world, but he who believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? with many more declarations to this effect, all of them importing this single proposition, *That Jesus is the Christ or Messiah.*

Now whereas, in the passage before us, it is said, *I believe that Jesus is the Son of God* (which sufficed for admittance into the Christian covenant) it may be of use to make a further search into the meaning of this expression, and to settle that meaning distinctly, as far as we can, upon the foundation of Scripture and truth. Two things are to be considered; what we are to understand by the appellation *Jesus* in this place (for I enquire no further now than the passage itself leads me) and what by this other, *Christ*. Now *Jesus* here has no reference, or no immediate view at least, to the nature and origin of our blessed Lord as a divine Person, which are to be deduced from other places, and not from this; but to the circumstances of his history, and to points of fact, as recorded of him in the Gospel. He was named *Jesus*, which signifies a *Saviour* (because he was to *save his people from their sins*). And how he did so, we see plainly in his history. *Jesus* therefore, in this place, denotes to us that holy person, who, by the power of the Holy Ghost, was born of the Virgin Mary, was eminent for his miracles in the land of Israel, was the first and most extraordinary Preacher of the Gospel, was cruci-
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fied by the Jews, arose the third day from the dead, and gloriously ascended into heaven ; where being seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, he is invested with supreme power and authority over all things in heaven and earth. This is he who, amongst his countrymen the Jews, went by the name of *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Next, for the style *Christ*. This imports the *Office* of our Lord, and according to the uniform sense of the New Testament, never varying on this head, nor intending more in any one place than it does in another, plainly signifies the *Messiah*, or that Prophet and Minister of God, who for many ages had been promised to the people of Israel, who was to deliver them from their sins, and introduce them into the heavenly Canaan. Now this high office and dignity, is sometimes set forth to us by the title *Christ*, sometimes by, *The Son of God* ; both, in this respect, importing the same thing ; so that whether you say, Jesus is the *Christ*, or Jesus is the *Son of God*, there is no real difference : And that the Jews understood both these appellations in the same sense, may easily be made appear from several passages. When Philip said to Nathanael, *We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets did write* (who could be no other than the Messiah that had been promised to the people) Nathanael soon after seeing our Lord, and carrying the words of Philip in his mind, gives them their true and proper sense, by saying to our Saviour, *Thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel* *. When our Lord asked his disciples, *Whom do men say that I am ?*

* *Job. i. 46, 50.*

Peter answered, in the name of them all, *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God* *. Which words being recited by St. Mark, are couched in this single sentence, *Thou art the Christ* †, and are by St. Luke thus expressed, *Thou art the Christ of God* ‡. From whence it appears, that the words *Son of God* in St. Matthew, are only an explication of the word *Christ*, and have the same meaning with the Eunuch's confession in the passage we are considering. But what will remove all ground of doubt about this matter, is what passed upon the occasion of the High Priest's adjuring our blessed Saviour to tell him, *Whether he was the Christ the Son of God* **. The true sense of which words may be learned from St. Luke, who expresses the matter in a clearer and more distinct manner, chap. xxii. For after the Elders and chief Priests had interrogated our Lord, ver. 67. saying, *Art thou the Christ?* the same persons, presently after repeating the same question, say in other words (ver. 70), *Art thou the Son of God?* Which is a clear evidence that *Christ* and *Son of God*, were in their sense equivalent terms, carrying exactly the same idea ††.

This

* *Matth.* xvi. 16. † *Mar.* viii. 29. ‡ *Luke* x. 20.

** *Matth.* xxvi. 63.

†† The pious and ingenious author of a late treatise entitled, *Useful and important Questions concerning Jesus the Son of God*, in which are many valuable observations upon this subject, was not, I perceive so happy as to have seen this work of Mr. Limborch before he composed

his

This observation is of the greatest use towards fixing the genuine sense of this proposition, *Jesus is the Christ*, or the *Son of the God*. For from thence it plainly appears, that the name *Christ*, which signifies *Anointed*, and is the same with the Hebrew *Messiah*, has no relation to the *nature* or *person* of our Blessed Lord (these, as I observed before, being altogether foreign to the present question) but to his *office*; since we find that Kings and Priests, and sometimes also Prophets, were consecrated to their respective offices by the ceremony of anointing. Upon which account, those who were invested with such offices, were called *the anointed of God* * ? From whence it follows, that to *believe Jesus* to be the *Christ* or *Son of God* (permit me to remind you once more of this important ex-

this own. Otherwise he would have cleared up the point at once. For he appears to be an ingenuous searcher after truth; which indeed he has very well hit off in general; only some small remains of *system* which still hung about him (tho' perhaps undiscerned) embarrassed him a little in his enquiries. The late bishop *Patrick* has been more successful, and has given us a very clear elucidation of this subject in his *Witnesses to Christianity*, chap. 1. which is well worth considering. His enquiries terminate in the same conclusion with those of Mr. *Limborch*; shewing, that "to be *the Son of God*, and to be *the Christ*, are but different expressions of the same thing; and that when the Apostle says, *Jesus is the Son of God*, his meaning is, that he is the Holy One of God, the person whom God sanctified by the union of the Holy Ghost, and sent into the world, to whom he hath now given all power in heaven and in earth, that every knee should bow to him as the sovereign Lord of the world; whom we are to hear and obey and depend upon in all things."

† 1 Sam. xxiv. 6. Psal. cv. 15.

important explanation) is to believe that Jesus, who lived in Judea, and was every where known by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, is that extraordinary Saviour that had been long promised, to whom God his Father committed the high trust of saving men, and whom, that he might be duly consecrated to that office, He anointed with the Holy Ghost.

If this be the case (as it evidently is) these two remarks will be obvious. 1st, That the *belief* intended in *Joh. xx. 31*, is a very different thing from that which the latter part of the comment produced at the entrance of this Letter, p. 40. delivered to us as the sense, and insisted upon as necessary; that sense having no foundation in that passage at least, nor seemingly any connexion with it, or with any other that relates to the present subject. 2. That the *Albanasian creed*, has not only mistaken the great point upon which the salvation of men is constantly placed in the New Testament, but also loaded the Christian Religion with difficulties to which in its nature and design it is a perfect stranger. You see how plain and simple the Religion of Christ was at the first, and how few the terms of salvation: *Believe that Jesus is the Christ, and thou shalt be saved*. Herein consists the very essence of that faith which was required by the Apostles and their followers as necessary to salvation. Would to God that Christians of succeeding ages had acquiesced in this apostolical simplicity!

That short symbol of Christian belief and unity, which goes by the name of the *Apostles Creed*, and is expressed in substance in these few words, *I believe that Jesus is the Christ*, has for many ages been used in the Christian Church,

and (making due allowance for the sense of some few articles, which either have been added, or at least are now less clear in their meaning than they may have been at first) is worthy to be retained in it. For it exhibits the common confession of Christians in all necessary articles of their faith *; and those, for the most part, expressed in words that are easily intelligible to the meanest understanding, and to which all believers of revelation can readily give their assent. This was the confession required to be made at Baptism, tho' in the days of the Apostles it was expressed in fewer words. Those who made this confession, were admitted to Baptism, and consequently into the Christian Church, without further enquiry. Here was the brevity and simplicity of the Christian Faith at the beginning. But it grieves me to remind you of what happened afterwards. When the Roman Empire became Christian, the Christian Religion (will you not wonder?) was no longer what it had been. The simplicity of Christian belief, together with the innocence of Christian morals, began then to be corrupted. For soon after this great (and in some respects happy) Revolution, new creeds were demanded; and accordingly, as if the plain and

* Bishop Taylor having enumerated a variety of opinions in matters of doctrine, that gave disturbance to the Church, says, very appositely to the present subject, *We have no other help in the midst of these distractions and divisions, but all of us to be united in that common term, which is the medium of the communion of saints, the Apostles creed, and in all other things an honest endeavour to find out what truths we can, and a charitable and mutual permission to others that disagree from us and our opinions. I am sure this may satisfy us, for it will secure us; but I know not any thing else that will.* Epist. dedic. to Lord Hatton before Lib. of prophesying.

and common creed which had hitherto been acquiesced in, had not been sufficient, new articles of faith, before unknown, began to be devised, new formularies to be framed, and those expressed in a variety of words and phrases with which the holy Scriptures are unacquainted ; so that every new Council in a manner coined a new creed * ; to which if any one could not assent, he was judged unworthy of Christian communion, and condemned as a person devoted to destruction †. Nor did this extravagant humour of condemning stop here, or end with the first councils, but all succeeding ones loaded the Christian faith with new articles, and that to such a degree, that it was now no longer a plain and simple faith, level to the understanding of the ignorant as well as of the learned, but was become a sort of science for disputing, overcharged with a vast number of opinions, enveloped in obscurity, and perplexed with subtlety ; as if almighty God, by proposing the Christian Religion to the world, had intended to puzzle our understandings, and to make this Religion a test, not of our piety, but of our subtlety ; promising, for the encouragement of that subtlety, to reward it with everlasting life. Hence arose innumerable schisms in the Church ; and whilst the several parties anathematize ‡ one another,

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* Which I suppose made the great *Episcopus* (our Author's uncle) say, That the Bishops of those times, being led on by fury, faction and madness, did not so much *compose* as *buddle* up creeds for the Christian world.

† Councils after Councils convened to settle the differences amongst Christians ; and sometimes they met so frequently, that they might be called *Quarter sessions* as well as Councils. Mr. *Fortin's* pref. to *Remarks*, vol. 1.

‡ This anathematizing humour was common to all parties, as is evident from the ecclesiastical historians ;
and

Various storms of persecution fall upon the heads of the dissentients, and draw after them a dismal train of evils. All which might easily have been prevented, if later ages, keeping to the simplicity of the preceding times, had been content with those few and plain articles, which distinguish Christians from Jews, and from the professors of all false religions; and had insisted upon no other points of belief as necessary to salvation, besides those which the Apostles and first Christians required for baptism, and declared to be sufficient for the purpose of being saved. For the things that are necessary to salvation are invariably the same, and can neither be altered nor increased by succession of time. So that it must have been great presumption in after-ages
either

and it is observable that the violence of it rose in proportion as the articles of belief multiplied, and their subtleties grew more exquisite. What lamentable work was that at the council of *Ephesus*, in regard to *Nestorius's* twelve propositions, which were required to be renounced; where each party insisting upon their own propositions as orthodox, and condemning the opposite as heretical, could agree in no one thing but this, *viz.* in anathematizing and cursing one another. The renouncing of propositions is still frequently required, and the refusal as often attended with anathema's. We sometimes hear of such doings in protestant countries, but lately much more in our accounts from *France*: where the renunciation, not of twelve, but of an hundred and one propositions, is with great vehemence insisted upon, and the recusants doomed to eternal damnation: As the Nun *S. Perpetua* lately experienced to her cost; upon whom the penitentiary, commissioned by no less a personage than the Archbishop of *Paris*, pronounced with the utmost assurance this dreadful sentence, *That her dissent would occasion her to be reprobated and damned at the day of judgment.*

either to vary or add to the terms of salvation which had been originally settled; and every presumption of this sort, as it was highly injurious to Men, must also be a capital offence against God, and therefore liable to the severest condemnation.

But it has been objected, that although such a short confession of Faith as was required at first, was indeed sufficient for those more early days, when the faith of all was uniform; yet in succeeding times, when clashing opinions and heresies arose in the Church, in regard to some particular points of religion, it became necessary, and continues to be so still, to insist upon a distinct confession, of a greater number of articles; to the intent that those who are orthodox, might be distinguished from those who are heretical.— But this is the very thing with which we here find fault; namely, that Christians, by inventing a new set of words and phrases, and setting up new opinions of their own, should chuse to recede and be distinguished from fellow-christians, who acknowledge all things contained in Scripture, and readily acquiesce in all the words and phrases that the sacred Writers have thought fit to use. Which plainly shews, that there is no difference about the main foundation, and therefore that the dissent which subsists about other matters, should be no bar to fellow-believers, agreeing upon that foundation, from cultivating ecclesiastical union, without indulging the uncharitable humour of pronouncing anathema's upon one another. For where God in his word pronounces no anathema, neither ought We to pronounce it; and those whom he vouchsafes to admit into the communion of the saints in heaven, we cannot, without the grossest injury, exclude from the communion of his Church upon earth. But

But you will further say, " That *Scripture*, strictly speaking, is the genuine *sense* of Scripture, and that since these persons admit only of the *words* of Scripture, not their genuine *sense*, they cannot be said to admit the Scripture."—As to this, I readily agree with you, that the *sense* of Scripture is indeed *Scripture*. But since God hath been pleased, in his infinite wisdom, to deliver that sense in such words, as are capable of a different meaning, and has no where declared, that the words must be taken precisely in this or that sense, and in no other; has he not by this very conduct, in effect assured us, that he does not tie down mens salvation * to this or that particular confession, formed upon either of the different explications; but that the general or common faith, about which there is no disagreement on any side, is sufficient for Salvation; and that we may safely be ignorant of all controverted opinions both on the one side and on the other? And since God hath not delegated to either party

* It was to Bishop Taylor a *demonstration* (as he tells us in his *Lib. of proph.* Sect i. N^o. 12.) " that nothing can be necessary to be believed under pain of damnation, but such propositions of which it is certain that God hath spoken and taught them to us, and of which it is certain that *this* is their sense and purpose. For if the sense be *uncertain*, we can no more be obliged to believe it in a *certain* sense, than we are to believe it at all, if it were not certain that God delivered it. But if it be only certain that God spake it, and not certain to what *sense*; our *faith* of it is to be as *indeterminate* as its sense; and it can be no other in the nature of the thing, nor is it consonant to God's justice to believe of him that he can or will require more. This is of the nature of those propositions, to which, without any farther probation, all wise men will give assent at its first publication."

dominion over the conscience of the other, and each side questioning the truth of the other's opinion, insists upon its own as being most agreeable to Scripture ; it is clear at once, that neither side ought to obtrude its confession upon the other, insisting upon the other's agreeing to it; but that as the one party desires to have the confession and defence of its own opinion left free to it; so should it allow the same freedom to the other, which it claims to itself. The erring party is accountable only to God for its error. In the mean time, both should endeavour to approve their faith to Him; nor should either of them condemn the other, since they both join in the same common faith, altho' in some things, not precisely determined by almighty God, they may happen to vary or disagree. Now in order to obtain this desirable end, we must go back to the original simplicity of the Gospel; which will teach us, that whosoever professes to believe from his heart that Jesus is the Son of God, is to be received into Christian communion, and ought to be acknowledged by us as our Christian brother."

These are the sentiments of that great and good man *, who was such an ornament to the Christian Religion both in his doctrine and morals, and who made it the great business of his life to understand and teach this religion in its true simplicity and purity.

You are now, Sir, I hope, sufficiently satisfied concerning the point which I undertook to illustrate in this Letter; and it is, you see, a point of great consequence to be rightly understood; since the due understanding of it removes

* *Limborch.*

removes the difficulties that are thrown in our way by human systems, and the terms that may be injected into our minds by menacing creeds. The difficulties wherein we are intangled by the former, and the threatenings denounced upon us by the latter, do now evidently appear to be without foundation.

I might here put an end to your trouble and my own for this time: but having lately been much delighted with some charitable and judicious observations of a very worthy Clergyman, which I judge to be pertinent to the present subject, I cannot conclude my Letter without communicating to you a pleasure which has been so agreeable to myself, believing it will be no less so to your humane and benevolent mind.

I must first observe to you, that this good man appears from all his notes on the New Testament (from whence I now collect his sentiments) to be entirely orthodox, upon the present question. But that orthodoxy, which in many men breaks out into flame and violence, is in him restrained from all undue excesses, by the milder spirit of the Gospel; which as it gives a more pleasing aspect, adds also a dignity to his remarks upon the subject.

Speaking of the late unhappy disputes upon the great theme of the Trinity, as he justly censures on the one side the unreasonableness of those, who will believe nothing in divine things but what they can comprehend, observing that *we should be modest and humble in our determinations about what is so far above our own reach*; so he seems to think that others, who in the main espouse the same cause with himself, go too often beyond their bounds, and thereby become

come the occasion of a controversy, which otherwise might have had no existence, or else might have been stifled in the birth. " The rise, says he, of those disputes is, I am persuaded, in a great measure owing to mens going further in their *divisions, distinctions, and definitions* concerning this subject, than divine *revelation* will bear them out. — I will beg leave humbly to offer one thing to be considered with reference to this subject, namely, whether *such a profession of faith* in our Redeemer as was *accepted of, and approved by, our Lord and his Apostles*, ought not to be *sufficient* to clear any one from the imputation of being an * *heretick* ? " The passages to which he here directs us, are these. Peter said, *Thou art the Christ the Son of the*

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* It is not quite so easy, as many may imagine, to say who are hereticks, or what is heresy. For what is heresy to one, is catholick truth to another ; and whilst each party condemn their adversaries, they believe their own positions to be right. Again ; Heresy, the schoolmen tell us, must be against some articles of faith. Now it is not agreed how many are such, or what makes them so. The Church of *Rome*, we find, has an immense number of articles ; and all Churches and persons who reject them, are considered by her as heretical. And yet this same Church, so abounding with articles, has the charity to declare, *That none can be an Heretick, who believes that one article of our Creed*, The holy catholick Church : *Verus noni articuli professor, nequit dici hæreticus*. Catech. Trident. de nono symboli art. Mild and candid to an uncommon degree was that judgment of *Salmanfis* concerning the Arians, which I find cited by Bp. *Barlow* in his Letter to Mr. *Boyle* concerning Toleration. *Hæretici sunt, jéd non scientes : apud nos sunt hæretici, apud se non sunt. Veritas apud*

living God : And, *We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God* ^a Nathanael ; *Thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel* ^b Martha ; *I believe that thou art the Christ the Son of God, who was to come into the world* ^c The Eunuch, *I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God* ^d Saul (or Paul) *preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God* — proving that this is the very Christ or Messiah ^e *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God*, ^f *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he who believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* ^g — “ It is here supposed, “ as the author goes on, that the words are “ taken in the sense which is obvious to every “ unprejudiced mind. But it is difficult for us “ to know when men wilfully mistake the sense “ of Scripture, and wrest it to their own destruction : for we are ignorant of the reasonings “ and thoughts of each other, and therefore “ cannot judge of them any farther than they “ by words and actions discover them to us. “ But if men [*notwithstanding their best endeavours, do really*] mistake the sense of Scripture, I see not what we can do better than “ pity and pray for them, and calmly, in the Spirit

nos est ; sed illi apud se esse præsumunt. Errant ergo, sed bono animo errant ; non odio, sed affectu Dei honorare se Dominum credentes. Et qualiter pro hoc ipso falsæ opinionis errore in die judicii puniendi sunt, nemo potest scire nisi judex. — Nihil ardet in inferno nisi propria voluntas.

Matth. xvi. 16. and Joh. vi. 69. b Joh. i. 49.
^c *Joh. xi. 27. d Acts viii. 37.*
^e *Acts ix. 20, 22. f 1 Joh. iv. 15.*
^g *chap. v. 5.*

“ spirit of meekness and love, debate the matter
 “ in dispute, illustrating a doubtful text by
 “ others which are more clear. For to
 “ give those who differ from us *opprobrious*
 “ *names*, or to fix *odious consequences* on their
 “ opinions, which are by them disowned and
 “ disavowed, or to call men’s *sincerity* into
 “ question, because they do not think just as we
 “ do: whatever any may pretend, these are
 “ not the effects of a *true zeal* for God and Re-
 “ ligion. Let us take heed that we do not
 “ sometimes call that zeal for God and his
 “ Gospel, which is nothing else but our own
 “ tempestuous and stormy passion. I would
 “ only desire those who are apt to suffer them-
 “ selves to be thus transported, but to think
 “ it *possible* for *themselves* to be mistaken; and
 “ then to consider, whether *such* treatment
 “ would be likely to *convince* them of their
 “ mistakes and errors? ——— Such proceedings
 “ are no way suited to convince a *reasonable*
 “ *mind*: they never yet wrought conviction in
 “ any man, nor did they ever serve the interest
 “ of religion and truth. I am not moved to
 “ [say] this, by any doubts I have myself, but
 “ to express my dislike of a practice too too
 “ common among the too many denominations
 “ of Christians, the imposing their *own glosses*
 “ and interpretations of Scripture, as the un-
 “ doubted, certain, and infallible mind and
 “ will of Christ. Even the *Protestant Churches*,
 “ tho’ they have justly cast off the *Romish*
 “ *Yoke*, yet have not sufficiently purged out
 “ this *Remainder of Popery*. It is undoubtedly
 “ more agreeable to the temper of the *Gospel*,
 “ to *bear* with those whom we cannot convince,

“ than it is to persecute [or even to *bate and*
 “ despitefully use] them. Our duty is, to speak
 “ the truth to them in *love*. As on the one
 “ hand, we ought earnestly to contend for the
 “ *faith once delivered to the saints* ; so, on the
 “ other, we ought to have and maintain a
 “ *compassionate love* for those who deviate from
 “ it. I am persuaded, that *this* way of pro-
 “ ceeding would conduce more than *any other*,
 “ to the bringing in the universal practice of
 “ *Holiness, Peace, and Love*, which many wise
 “ and good men think they are encouraged to
 “ hope for in the Scriptures of both Testa-
 “ ments.”

I heartily wish that all Christians, of what-
 ever persuasion, whether relating to this or any
 other disputed or disputable points of Christianity,
 would attend to the words of this good Man ;
 — bear with one another, and live in peace,
 notwithstanding the difference of their sentiments
 in regard to any of those points: Which dif-
 ference, in many cases, is absolutely unavoid-
 able in the present state of humanity, and can
 therefore be no real fault on either side, pro-
 vided men maintain that difference with candor of
 mind, and with decency of behaviour towards
 each other. Which surely it would be no difficult
 matter for either side to do, if they would but
 consider things with *calmness*, and not suffer
passion to carry away their *reason*, or *prejudice*
 in favour of *tenets* to make them forget real
duties. I cannot but wish that learned men on
 both sides, would be more moderate and more
 civil, than they often are towards each other,
 when they happen to disagree in opinion, and
 especially upon the subject before us. If I take
 the learned Dr. *Felton's* meaning right, he
 tells

tells us, that the orthodox party (as, in conformity to common language, I would chuse to call them) are very civil and moderate towards those who *retain* different tenets, when they hold and publish them with becoming modesty, without bitterness of spirit, or reviling language. I should be glad to see the amiable character duly exemplified in practice by both parties. These are his words, in the dedication of his sermons at the Lady Moyer's lecture, to the late Bishop of London: "When any persons will argue *seriously*, and treat things sacred with *decency*, and carry themselves in these debates, as becometh *scholars* and *gentlemen*, we are always ready to entertain such adversaries with great *candour*, to *weigh* *considerately* whatever they are pleased to offer, and to return them an answer with all *good temper* and *civility*." The words please me, and shew at least what *ought* to be the conduct of Christians towards each other, if it is not already so in *fact*.

As to the subject itself, which the Athanasian Creed and other human decisions have involved in so many unpassable labyrinths, I am, for my own part, fully convinced, from a careful consideration of the Scriptures for many years, that *orthodoxy in opinion* about this point, or indeed about any other that may be liable to doubts and difficulties, is not the main thing which the Gospel insists upon as necessary to salvation. So far from this, that it does not build upon orthodoxy at all, considered (according to the meaning of the word) as a particular and precise notion about any certain topicks of belief. But on what does it build? Upon this one great article, as I intimated before, *Believe the Gospel and obey it*. This is the sum total of Christianity,

Christianity, and upon this we may safely build our hopes of salvation, through the mercies of God in Jesus Christ. We need not be anxious about *modes* of believing. Let us keep this one great point in view, and heartily comply with it ; and we are safe. We are in the hands of a gracious Master, who will make favourable allowances for our infirmities, where we may happen to be wrong in our opinion as to some particular circumstances of belief ; and where he sees that we seek the truth with honest minds, desirous to be guided by it, and do not err wilfully, or out of a criminal prejudice of any sort. He will condemn none who believe the Gospel in the best manner they can, and who, in the best manner they can, endeavour to obey it. Of this you may be very sure, and consequently need not be frightened at the denunciations of any creeds. To which you may justly oppose those decisive words of St. *John*, with which I began and shall now conclude my Letter, viz. *These things are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah, and that [so] believing ye may have Life through his name.* Upon this firm bottom rest thoroughly satisfied, and be no way uneasy for the future.

You will hear from me again the first opportunity ; and I shall then return to the creed which engaged me in these enquiries.

L E T T E R

LETTER III.

SIR,

IN my first Letter (to which the second, as I intimated, was designed as supplement only but a necessary or at least an useful one) I endeavoured from many observations to satisfy you, that the creed which has long been considered not only as the palladium, but also as the quintessence of orthodoxy, is not quite so unexceptionable in all its parts, as the author of it (whoever he was) would have us believe it to be, or as its advocates, whether in former or latter times, have insisted that it is. I am of opinion that this point may fairly be disputed with both, so long as we have the Scripture before us, and have the liberty to examine this creed by that infallible Rule; a liberty which probably the greater part of Christians had not, when the creed was compiled: Which, I persuade myself, from the very precarious history of it given us by its best friends, as well as from other evidences, was done in some of the darker ages of the Church; a circumstance, I own, which does not greatly recommend it to my esteem, nor will, I suppose, to yours.

I have sufficiently considered those sentences of damnation, which this formulary so frequently recites, and so freely pronounces upon those who
cannot

cannot assent to it. Surely, to apply the words to this creed.

— *Nimium feritatis in illo est:*

Est aliud levius fulmen.

Let those sentences then if you please, pass for *bruta fulmina* (for they really are no more) denounced without authority from the word of God, and therefore, which I am sorry to say, disparaging a whole composition, which though it hath some things in it that cannot very well be justified, yet hath unquestionably some others, that *may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture.*

In this Letter, I shall take a different course with this creed. I shall compare it with Scripture in another view, regarding chiefly its diction and manner of instruction; which, I see plainly, are very different from those which we find in Scripture. The comparing of these two together, will perhaps as much lessen our esteem for the one, as it will increase it for the other. Which, so long as truth is not hurt by the comparison, is, I own, a consequence, to which I shall have no objection. For I have always hitherto had a greater regard for the Bible, than for any human compositions.

Let us bring into one view the language and declarations of both. I shall begin with the creed; to which many seem by their conduct to pay as great a deference as they do to the Scripture: I will not say that they pay a greater; tho' this possibly may be found to be fact, if you examine things to the bottom, and attentively observe men's behaviour and writings.

In this creed we have the following peculiarities; which if some of its friends had not, I should

not

not perhaps have presumed to call *niceties of explication*.

“ Such as the Father, such is the Son, and
 “ such is the Holy Ghost. Not three Fathers,
 “ not three Sons, not three Holy Ghosts : Not
 “ three Lords, not three Gods, not three eter-
 “ nals, not three incomprehensibles, not three
 “ uncreated, not three almighties. Not made,
 “ nor created, nor begotten. Neither made,
 “ nor created, *but* begotten. Neither made,
 “ nor created, nor begotten, but *proceeding*.
 “ None afore or after other : None greater or
 “ less than another. Glory equal ; Majesty co-
 “ eternal. Whole three Persons co-eternal to-
 “ gether and co-equal. Not confounding
 “ the persons, nor dividing the substance. Not
 “ by confusion of substance, but by unity of
 “ person. Not by conversion of the godhead,
 “ but by taking of the manhood, &c. Not
 “ two, but one Christ. God of the substance of
 “ the Father. Equal to the Father : Inferior to
 “ the Father, &c.” *This is the catholic faith :
 He that will be saved, must thus think of the
 Trinity.*

Now are these expressions agreeable to those of the Gospel ? Are they suitable to the plainness, and simplicity, and majesty, which we there find ? Where do we meet with such nice distinctions as these, about the sacred Trinity, in the sacred Oracles ? or where with such a terrible doom passed, for not acquiescing in such subtle refinements ; or not admitting such additions to the word of God ? I shall come to the declarations of *Scripture* by and by. In the mean time, let me give you a few more specimens of the former kind.

It grieves me to find such, in any compositions but especially in any solemn *addresses* made to almighty God. Which ought evermore to be free from any mixture of this sort, and to have nothing in them unsuitable to the nature and design of prayer; lest when we blend our *niceties of explication* about points of faith and controversy, with our applications to Heaven in acts of devotion and piety, we may seem to be taking too much upon us, to be informing almighty God what tenets we hold, in contradistinction to all who differ from us, and what are the *specialties* of our belief in some abstruse points, wherein others cannot concur with us: Which, as Bp. Taylor speaks in another case, is no better than “ deriving our *opinions* into ‘our *devotions*; “ making *school-points* become our *religion*; “ making God (so far as we can) a *party* in, and “ entitling him to, our impertinent *wranglings*.”

It is with some unwillingness, I own, that I presume to remind you of the following instance, which I fear may be too much of this kind, in a sacred office, which both of us highly value. “ Who art one *God*, one *Lord*, not one “ only *Person*, but *three Persons* in one *Substance*. “ For, that which we believe of the glory of “ the Father, the same we believe of the Son, “ and of the Holy Ghost, without any difference “ or inequality.” Is not this a *creed*, rather than a *prayer*? Or is that called the Athanasian, upon which this precatory creed is founded, any creed at all? Has it any thing of the form and manner of a *creed*? any thing of that modest and unassuming air, so visible and so amiable in other creeds? where every one speaks only for himself, *I believe*, and no more, not taking upon him to dictate to others, what *They* shall believe;

believe ; much less saying (as this creed in effect teaches every one to say) *He that believeth not as I do, shall be damned, or shall without doubt perish everlastingly.* Which plainly makes this to be a kind of *Dooms-day book*, rather than a Creed. ^a

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a Dr. *Waterland* allows, that this formulary, is not composed in the way of a creed ; and that it was but very rarely called *symbolum* by the antients ; acknowledging the justness of the remark of *Tho. Aquinas*, who said that it was not composed *per modum symboli, sed magis per modum cujusdam doctrinæ* (which same *cujusdam doctrinæ*, by the way, might, I suppose, seem even to this great connoisseur in metaphysical theology, to be somewhat more nice than wise ; but nevertheless, as he goes on) *auctoritate summi Pontificis receptæ, ut QUASI regula fidei HABEATUR.* Crit. hist. p. 49. 214. Yet it was a long time, as the Doctor elsewhere acknowledges, before the authority of this *Chief Priest* (the Pope) could be prevailed upon to countenance this creed, or consent to its adoption into the Roman offices. For he stood it out for some centuries (for five at least, according to the Doctor's own calculation) before he would suffer it to be taken in. Vid. Crit. Hist. ch. vi. And yet the Historian labours hard, not only to make the creed as antient, but also to make the reception of it as early, as possible. But to what purpose all this labour ? For if the creed is not grounded upon the Scripture, it is no matter how antient it is, or how early its reception was. And whereas this learned person would make it to be the work, not of a Presbyter, as some had contended it was, but of a Bishop, or rather an Archbishop (for upon this also he has laid out some pains) does this give any additional worth to the creed, make it more solid and more convincing, or derive a greater obligation upon us to receive it, if we cannot be persuaded that it is agreeable to the Gospel ? Suppose this great Man could have proved it to be the work, not of a Bishop, but of an *Apostle*, or even of an *Angel* ;

I go on. What shall we say next, or what shall we think, of the following stupendous composition? of much older date, I imagine, than either of the former.—“ Perfect God, even
 “ with his body, but not God with relation to
 “ his body; and perfect Man, even with his
 “ godhead, but not Man, with relation to his
 “ godhead. In like manner, that he is to be
 “ entirely worshipped even with his body, but
 “ not to be worshipped as to his body; that he
 “ be worshipped entirely, even with his godhead,
 “ but not as God. That he is uncreated even
 “ with his body, but not uncreated with relation

Angel; still we are to remember what *St. Paul* hath said, *Gal. i. 8. 9.* And since this Writer indulges his conjectures about the Author of the creed (whom he will have at last to be a *Gallican* Prelate) may not *we* also be allowed the liberty to conjecture what *St. Paul* would have said to the creed itself, if it had appeared in his days? Which since it is supposed to be of *Gallican* extraction, it is well if our modern *Anti-gallicans*, who had not, I think, started up in *Dr. Waterland's* time, do not take it into their heads to consider it as a *Gallican commodity*, and accordingly make a push, upon this very account, towards sending it back into its own country. To conclude this note with my real and very serious opinion concerning this elaborate work of *Dr. Waterland*; I think he hath bestowed his learned labour about it to very little useful purpose, and might have laid it out to far better, by promoting practical piety, and advancing true goodness in the world. For after all that the Doctor has done, in giving us the history of this creed, he hath not made the creed one jot the better, nor the objections to it at all the weaker. Nor has this work of his, in support of it, either removed men's prejudices against it or heightened their opinion of its defender. The merit of this creed is to be tried by *Scripture*, and not by history, or by any human authority.

“ lation to his body ; that he was made, even with
 “ his godhead, but not as to his godhead :
 “ That he is altogether of the same substance
 “ with God, even with his body, but not of
 “ the same substance as to his body.” With
 more of the same strain, unnecessary to be recit-
 ed, and not very useful to be remembered. Could
 you have imagined that so strange a composition
 had been drawn up in a solemn council, and in
 an early age ? Yet in these words did the Fathers
 at *Antioch*, so early as A. D. 270, or there-
 abouts, think fit to set forth their confession or
 exposition of faith, recommending it to the
 whole Greek Church as a *form of sound words*
 not to be disputed, tho’ it contained so many
 intricacies of expression, as well as novelties of
 of invention ^a. Which with the like niceties
 that

^a Hence came on by degrees, especially about the
 beginning of the 5th century, those other novelties of
 invention, unknown at least to the Scripture, and to the
 Apostolical times, concerning such points as these (mere
 sophisms or quibbles upon words) *God was born, God*
suffered, God died, Mary was the Mother of God, &c.
 Which last declaration, might, I suppose, give occasion
 to a poet of the last age to play off his fancy in these
 quaint turns of wit, addressed to the Blessed Virgin,

Sponsa Dei, Patrisque Parens, et Filia Fili :
Virgo, nec absque Viro ; Mater, at absque Viro.

He endeavours, you see, to mimick, after some sort,
 the distinctions which he had observed in those *refinements*
of theology which had been begun by the Fathers, im-
 proved by the schoolmen, and were now unhappily re-
 vived and much delighted in by his contemporaries, in
 the days of King *James* the first ; when the *art of*
punning had gained the ascendant, in the pulpit, and
 religion was in a manner excluded out of it.

The

that afterwards followed, niceties no where to be found in the Gospel, no way necessary to salvation, nor at all necessary to be determined, either one way or other, in order to the advancement of religion, drew on by degrees endless disputes; insomuch that, as the Historian ^b observes, a *dialectical war*, or a contest about mere metaphysical speculations, and equivocal terms, spread its dire influences far and wide over *Egypt, Lybia, Thebais*, and all the oriental provinces; and the disputing humour increased at such a rate, among men of all professions and degrees, that it became at last impossible to put a stop to it. All which might have been prevented, if men had acquiesced in the declarations of the Gospel, and had not indulged their inventions too much about things which before were left in
medico,

The poets have in all Ages of the Church been exercising their wit upon mysteries; which they never failed to obscure with the varieties, whilst they were endeavouring to embellish them with the elegancies, of their distinctions. Take this one little sample out of the many; which I give you from an hymn of the famous *Heidelberg*, Archbishop of Tours.

*Paracletus increatus, — Neque factus neque natus :
 Patri compar, Filioque: — Sic procedit ab utroque ;
 Ne sit minor potestate, — Vel discretus qualitate.
 Quanti illi, tantus iste: — Quales illi, talis iste :
 Ex quo illi, hinc et iste: — Semper illi, semper iste.
 Quisque trium, plenus Deus: — Non tres tamen Dî, sed Deus.*

I leave you now to your own reflexions, and shall trouble you no further with poetical antitheses.

^b *Socrates eccl. hist. l. 1. c. 6.*

medio,

medioc c, and not judged necessary to be determined to any particular sense ; every man being left to the liberty of our own judgment, and all consequently being at peace about such matters. — But to pass on.

Here again are some more of those subtle niceties which prevailed in the Christian Church, when primitive Christianity (plain and practical) had forsaken it. *Neque ex innascibilitate innascibili coequalem, sed ex generatione unigeniti non disparcm* d, i. e. (to give it a literal translation) “ Not coequal from innascible innascibility, but not unequal from the generation of the only-begotten.” Now can you make *sense* of this ? Formy own part, I confess ingenuously that I can make none. To me it is, — *Je ne sçay ce que*. — *Nescio quid meditans* NUGARUM. And yet Dr. *Waterland*, I remember, doth somewhere cite these words as expressing the point in debate very accurately. Which I cannot contradict, since I do not understand them. These and the like subtleties of invention, so highly improper, in my opinion, upon so great a subject, and yet so highly in vogue in some of the earlier centuries, and even still not altogether

(c) Ἐριστικαὶ τινες διαλέξεις εἰς ζήτησιν ἀγνοῦσι τὰ πρότερον ἀνεξέταστα, &c. *Euseb. vit. Const.* l. 2. c. 68. And *Sozomen* (l. 1. c. 15) ascribes the disputes to the same causes.

d *Hilar de Trinit.* Which writer nevertheless concludes his 10th book upon the subject with these remarkable words, *Non per difficiles nos Deus ad beatam vitam quæstiones vocat*, &c. God does not call us to happiness by intricate questions. — Eternal life rests upon this plain and absolute point, viz. *That we believe that Jesus has been raised by God from the dead, and that we acknowledge him to be our Lord*, &c.

together in difesteem, would incline me to say, with a sensible man of those times, If the Christian Religion consists in such niceties, *Quam ingeniosa res est esse Christianum?* And with another, "That we are much beholden to the *metaphysicks* of *Aristotle*, for some of the articles of our *Christian creeds*." For according to these descants of the fancy, our religion is become a mere exercise of the wit unto sophistry, not (what it really is, or should be) an *exercise* of the heart unto *godliness*. This kind of exercise may indeed have somewhat of the *form of godliness*, but is manifestly unacquainted with its *power*, and in effect *denies* it, forasmuch as it draws away the mind from the main pursuit, and engages it in trifles.

Nor can I approve, much less admire, the following niceties in a more modern Writer, tho' a person of great name, and one for whose valuable character in many respects I have a very high esteem. This great man, when the nature of his subject would bear it, could express his thoughts with as much clearness as any man in the world; but in the passages I am going now to give you from different parts of his elaborate work, he envelops himself in clouds, or, as a learned man who animadverted upon him, expresses it, *in thick Cimmerian darkness*, his words being altogether of the mystick sort, and conveying no manner of idea even to the most perspicacious mind.

"The ancients, says he, styled the Father the origin or beginning of the Son; namely (here he comes in with his *niceties of explication*) as far as that word signifies a principle from which somewhat arises, but not as such a principle denotes a beginning of existence, when

Father produced this world by the Son, as an *instrument* [or as his Agent ;] yet meaning, not an instrument of *extraneous* nature, but one that was *connatural*" [with himself.] And lastly, (for it is no matter how soon we get out of such exquisite labyrinths) " The *Greeks* express the union between the Father and the Son (an union, by the way, which renders both inseparable) by the word περιχώρησις or (as he might have said) ἐν περιχώρησις, i. e. *circumincession*

* Now circumincession, is an union of things
every

* In a later work, he translates it *inexistence*, or *inhabitation* ; which some have more lately called *in-dwelling* ; I suppose, as being plainer *English* : but the *sense*, after all, is not plain. And indeed how should it be, when men go beyond their knowledge ; when they would explain, what they do not understand, and of which they can have no ideas ? The truth is, men having formed schemes of their own, or derived them from the Fathers, without warrant from the Scriptures, are naturally and necessarily brought into difficulties. For, being called upon for a *reason of the* opinion *that is in them*, they put their imagination upon the stretch, and then are forced to invent *words* as well as notions ; though all to no purpose : for the more they strive by these means to extricate themselves out of difficulties, the more they entangle themselves in them, and the faster they are set by their struggles to get loose. For my own part, I look upon these things as not a proper subject for metaphysical definitions, or *niceties of explication*, of any sort ; and am apt in my own mind to apply those words of the Apostle, used by him upon a different occasion ; asking, *Who hath known the mind of the Lord* as to these things, any farther than He hath revealed his mind in express words on the subject ? For (to use a proper comparison) *what Man knoweth the things of a Man, save the spirit of Man which is in him ? even so the things of God, where God hath not revealed them,*
knoweth

every way immeating or entering into one another. And in respect of the Trinity, this circumincession is in the highest degree peculiar, and is the most perfect that can be; since the persons [therein] do mutually contain each other." What a pity is it, that such great parts and learning should be thus misemployed, and thrown away upon such unintelligible — I doubt you will be too apt to think and call it *jargon*, or a chaos of words as much without meaning, as they are without foundation either in Scripture or in Reason. And yet this worthy person was, is, and perhaps for some time longer (I pretend not to guess how long) will be reckoned one of the clearest as well as strongest assertors of the mysterious cause which requires so much subtlety to maintain, and so much labour to understand. Which subtlety and labour are to me a plain indication, that the cause, as thus managed, or rather as mismanaged and perverted, is not of God, but purely of Men. These human mixtures and superadditions to the divine Word, too evidently betray their origin, and shew of themselves (as effects do their causes) that they cannot be divine. Else they could never have tortured the human invention so much, nor have been so derogatory to the honour of God, or so little beneficial to the souls of men. The *real* doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity, as revealed in the *Scriptures*, is quite another thing,

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and

knoweth no one but the Spirit of God. But God hath Not revealed unto us These Things (which Men would obtrude upon us as his, in their niceties of explication) by his Spirit, or by any part of his written Word.

and will always command the veneration of all serious and intelligent Christians †.

As to this celebrated Divine of our Church, whom I cannot think of without reverence, nor mention without a just honour for his merit (for he was possessed of many excellent qualities ;) his great unhappiness, as I take it, was, that he contracted, from his early years, too great a veneration for the *Fathers*, and followed them, I think I may venture to say, rather too implicitly ; as if their judgment was unquestionable, and therefore decisive upon the present argument. Whereas, if he had adhered to the *Scriptures* only, as the only sure rule to be governed by, upon this important subject ; he would, as I apprehend, have kept clear of all difficulties, and might, by his great abilities, have supplied us with as perspicuous and just an account of this matter, as any man of his time. Possibly this momentous thesis might have been cleared long ago, to the general satisfaction of the Christian world, if the pre-determinations of Fathers, Councils, Churches, and systems, had not placed a wrong bias upon our judgment, and thrown (I had almost said) insuperable difficulties in our way. When these difficulties are removed ; when we shall be prevailed upon to bring our enquiries upon this subject, to the test of *Scripture*

† I have the pleasure to find, in the Life of Archbishop Tillotson lately published, that that most judicious Person was of this sentiment. *He thought that the maintaining the doctrines concerning God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, as they are proposed in the Scriptures, without entering too much into explanations or controversies, would be the most effectual way to preserve the reverence that was due to them, and to fix them in men's belief.* p. 350.

ture only ; I am persuaded it will not be much longer, before this point is clearly adjusted, and amicably decided.

I have detained you too long, I fear, and indeed beyond what I intended, upon these not very instructive, nor, I imagine, very pleasing topicks. Truth will shine with the brighter lustre, when the clouds about it are removed ; and the endeavours that have been used to obscure, will help the more to clear it. Let us now therefore, after this dark and dreary prospect, turn our attention to a more agreeable and more improving scene. Leave behind you, and forget for ever if you can, these other *beggarly elements*, the mere inventions of men, so injurious to the revelations of God. Turn your eye and your heart, my Friend, to the heavenly Oracles. Let the sacred *Scriptures*, on every perplexing intrusion of this kind, come in immediately to your relief and assistance. Make Them your stay, your instruction, and your comfort, on all occasions of difficulty that shall force themselves into your way, and would shock your better sense, as well as damp your better hopes. Nor let the high pretensions of the authority of the *Fathers*, create in your mind the least uneasiness: For think immediately of an authority still higher than theirs. Remember Who hath said, *One is your Master* or Instructor ; *One is your Father who is in heaven ; One is your Master, even Christ : Call no man upon earth your Father **, viz. so as to allow him a *dominion over your faith* ; which should be allowed to no mortal man ; which even the Apostles, you know, who were superior to
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* *Matth.* xxiii. 8, 9. 10.

the Fathers, disclaimed over the faith of their fellow-christians, * referring to Christ as the sole Guide and Teacher of his Church, and professing *themselves* to be only *Ministers*, by *whom* others *believed* †. And remember to what authorities you are directed by *this* great Master and Teacher; *Search the SCRIPTURES; How readest thou?* Not search the *Fathers*: What readest thou in *Them*? Of whom we may justly say, without disparaging them in the least, that since they were but *Men*, and *were not All* of them *governed by the Spirit and Word of God*, *they have sometimes erred, even in things appertaining to God*. Wherefore their determinations, in things taught by them as necessary to salvation, have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared and proved that they be founded upon the *holy Scriptures*. To these Scriptures I now invite and conduct you with pleasure: To these, and to these alone I refer you, as your only Rule of Faith, and your safe Guides to Heaven.

Now when you look into these, do you not at once observe a *difference*? a difference both of style, and of thought, and of spirit, and of instruction, and of counsel? Where do you find, in these divine codes, such declarations as those with which I have troubled, and perhaps tired you, from the Fathers and their followers? declarations in the latter, how little like the noble simplicity, and majesty, and beauty, which we descry and are pleased with in the former? No subtle distinctions, no metaphysical niceties, no unavailing logomachies, or strife about words, to be found there. All is grand, and solemn,
and

* 2 Cor. i. 24. †. 1 Cor. iii. 5. see. 2 Cor. iv. 5.
1. Pet. v. 3.

serious ; all becoming the majesty of heaven, and *the doctrine which is according to godliness* and truth. For, the sacred writings, being to deliver the great message of salvation to men, delivered it with a plainness and simplicity suitable to so noble a design, and far more conducive to promote it, than those studied turns of wit, and those various modifications of expression, which run through the writings of many of the Fathers, especially of *St. Austin*, (who, by the way, was held in such high esteem at our Reformation,) and which some, whom I may name to you upon another occasion, have represented as the distinguishing excellencies, and even the perfection, of the *Athanasian Creed*. *St. Paul*, when he declared the testimony of God unto men, delivered it, as he tells us, *not with wisdom of words*, not with any curious distinctions, or terms of art, so common then in the world, as (unhappily) they still are, *lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect* ; but says he, in few and plain words, *I determined to know or to preach nothing among you, save Jesus Christ [or that Jesus is the Christ] and Him crucified* *, which comprehends the whole of the Gospel, as I have shewn you from *Mr. Limborch*; and is indeed a most glorious, as it is a most necessary, and at the same time a very intelligible and affecting truth.

Let us now attend to some of the declarations of the *Gospel*, concerning the Saviour of the World ; his divine origin, his glory, his majesty, his authority, and his godlike condescension to men.

“ In

* 1 Cor. ii. 1, 2, 3.

“ In the beginning was the Word * and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. This [*Word*] was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.” *Job*. i. 1, 2, 3,

“ God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the *Fathers*, by the *Prophets*, hath, in these last days, spoken unto *Us*, by his *Son*; whom he hath appointed Heir of all things; by whom also He made the *Worlds*. Who, being the Brightness of his *Father*’s Glory, and the exprefs Image of his Person †, and upholding all things by the word of
of

* The WORD, or the divine Oracle; alluding to the *Shechinah*, the *Glory*, the *Presence* of God under the Old Testament. See *Daubuz* and *Lowman* on *Rev.* xix. 13. who give the best and most satisfactory account that I remember to have met with, concerning this extraordinary title.

† Subsistence, τῆς ὑποστάσεως, I will endeavour to give you the sense of the period, from Mr. *Limborch*’s paraphrase and notes. The glory of God is as invisible as it is infinite, exceeding the utmost comprehension of the human mind. He dwelleth in the light which no Man can approach to; whom no Man hath seen, nor can see; (1 *Tim.* vi. 16). But the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, extremely beloved by him, and intimately acquainted with his counsels, he hath declared him, or made him known, (*Job*. i. 18. see *Luk.* x. 27. *Matth.* xi. 27. *Job.* vi. 46.) setting him forth to our view, in the clearest manner, in all the designations of his mercy towards men. For *Christ*, who is the image of the invisible God, hath, by the light of his glorious Gospel, shining out of darkness, given us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, or, of the glorious God (2 *Cor.* iv. 4, 6. *Col.* i. 15.) This is the general
scope

of his power; when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the Angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained

scope of the words. Take the particulars as follows. Christ is the *effulgence* or *resplendence* of his Father's glory; in whose divine doctrine, temper and conduct, the wisdom, holiness, and kindness of God towards the human race, shines out, or reflects itself, as in a mirror; or as the image of the Sun, whose dazzling splendor we cannot directly view with the naked eye, is exhibited to us in a cloud or perihelion. Again: Christ is the express *character* (the *impression*, as the word implies; the representation, or resemblance) of his Father's subsistence, substance or essence; meaning, in general, of the divine nature and perfections. As an impression made upon wax by a seal, exhibits the form or figure of that seal, or as a form impressed by an archetype, represents to us the archetype itself; so does Christ represent or exhibit to us God his Father; insomuch that by contemplating Him, we contemplate God; as he himself elsewhere intimates, *He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father* (Joh. xiv. 9.) Mr. Limborch takes notice by the way, that the proper design of this passage, is not to point out to us the *divine nature* of Christ; which, as such, says he, is equally inconspicuous, invisible, or incomprehensible with that of the Father; but the more immediate view of the words is, to exhibit Christ to us, as manifesting or setting forth in a most conspicuous light, the infinite glory and excellence of his Father, by the revelation of his Gospel, (2 Cor. iv. 4.) whereby all his attributes, in regard to the salvation of men, are most clearly and fully displayed. Thus; in the *wisdom* of Christ, who fully revealed to us the *last* and most perfect will of God, and had a most intimate knowledge of the hearts and thoughts of men; in his *holiness*, whereby he lived without the least spot of sin; and in his *love* towards men, which engaged him to undergo the most painful and ignominious

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death

tained a more excellent name than they. And *therefore*, Let all the Angels of God worship Him : (*Of whom it is said*,) Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever ; a sceptre of righteousness, is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth ; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish, but Thou remainest ; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment ; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed ; but Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." *Heb.* i. 1, &c.

" Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of Angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. — The Son of God was manifested: The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us: Emmanuel, God with us." 1 *Tim.* iii. 16. — 1 *Joh.* iii. 8. *Joh.* i. 14. *Matth.* i. 23.

" Christ Jesus being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, (*did not earnestly covet divine honours* *, but made himself

death ; in all these the infinite *wisdom, holiness* and *philanthropy* of God, shine forth as in a glass, or as the reflexion of the Sun upon the waters. This important passage being so well illustrated by this great Man, which had been greatly obscured by others, I thought it worth the while to collect into one view the substance of what he hath said, and here to oblige you with it. For I know you love the Scriptures, and are desirous to understand them.

* *Did not effect, did not assume, to be honoured as God.* Dr. Waterland's defence, p. 16 and 270 ; agreeably to what Christ says of himself, that he *sought not his own glory*, John. viii. 50. The words *ἐχ' αἰσχρογὰρ οὐκ ἠγάπα* in

himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name * ; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things † in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is *Lord*, to the glory of God the Father." *Phil.* ii. 5, — 11.

" Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature, (*Heir and Lord of all things* †.) For by Him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him. And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the Head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father,

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that

in *Phil.* ii. 6. seem to me to carry exactly the same sense as if the Apostle had said, *ὁυχ ἐζηλωσε* see *1 Cor.* xii. 31. and xiv. i, 39. where *ζηλώω* signifies *studiose affecto, vehementer ambio, &c.* and is rendered in our translation, to *desire*, to *covet earnestly*. And indeed learned men on both sides of the question in the Trinitarian controversy, have of late years amicably agreed, that this is the genuine sense of that uncommon phrase. *ὁυχ ἀρπαγμον ηγησάτο, &c.*

* See *Letter to the Mayor and Corporation of Deale*, p. 13, 14.

† Beings. † See *Whitby's* note in *loc.*

that in Him should all fulness dwell." *Col. i. 15, — 19.*

"The mystery * of God, even of the Father, and of Christ : in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge — in him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily. --- who is the Head of all principality and power, (angels, and authorities, and powers being made subject unto Him.)" *Col. ii. 2, 3, 9, 10. i Pet. iii. 22.*

"The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory (or *glorious Father*,) according to the working of his mighty power hath raised Christ from the dead, and set him on his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come : and hath put all things under his feet, and given Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." *Eph. i. 17, 20, — 23.*

"The Holy One, and the Just ; the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. — Whom the Heavens must receive (or *retain*) until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy Prophets since the world began. — For God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained ; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. — Then cometh the

* That is, i. e. dispensation. &c. *Whitby.*

the end, when he shall have delivered † up the kingdom to God, even the Father when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject to him that put all things under him, that God may be in all†." *Acts* iii. 14, 15. v. 31. iii. 21. xvii. 31. *1 Cor.* xv. 24, 28.

"The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants; — *even* Jesus Christ who is the faithful Witness, and the first-begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the Kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, even his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen *. Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds shall wail because of him: even so, Amen. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, who is, and who was

† Gr. *shall deliver*, ἔσται παραδόν.

‡ That God (*the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*) may be all in all: Dr. *Whitby's* paraphrase. But another Doctor, of known orthodoxy, seems to give the truer sense of the words. 'St. Paul tells us in this text, 'that when the Son gives up this oeconomical kingdom, he comes again into subjection; *Then shall the Son himself be subject to the Father*; which plainly shews, that considered as a *Son*, he is naturally subject to the *Father*, and at the end of this oeconomical exaltation he shall return to his natural subjection, and shall be so for ever when God appears *all in all*. This is most evidently the meaning of the great Apostle.'

* See chap. v. 13. *2 Pet.* iii. 18.

was, and who is to come, the Almighty *. I am the first and the last. I am he that liveth, and was dead : and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell and of death. — I am the bright and morning-star :
the

* *The Almighty.* Is this meant of the *Father*, or of the *Son*? The point has been much debated, but never, that I know of, decided : and I apprehend that nothing certain can be concluded on either side. For my own part, I think it not improbable that our Lord Jesus is the person here intended ; and I can very well account to myself for this title's being ascribed to him. First I consider the original word, παντοκράτωρ : the proper meaning of which is, *bearing universal rule or dominion* ; which may very justly be applied to our Lord, as having the sovereignty deputed to him over all created beings. This was the sense in which *Hippolytus* (cited on both sides) understood the title : Καλῶς ἔπεν [Ἰωάννης] παντοκράτορα Χριστὸν : — μαρτυρῶν γὰρ Χριστὸς ἔφη, Πάντα μοι παραδέδοται παρὰ τοῦ Πατρὸς, καὶ πάντων κρατεῖ. Παντοκράτωρ παρὰ Πατρὸς κατεστάθη Χριστὸς : that is, *John very properly styles Christ almighty. For Christ himself made this declaration, All things are delivered to Me by the Father : Accordingly he governs all things, being appointed universal Ruler of the Father.* Contr. Noetum 8. And Dr. *Waterland*, having allowed that παντοκράτωρ sect. 6. is sometimes used by the Fathers in such a lower sense, as does not come up to the strength of the Hebrew *Jahvoh zebaoth* (Lord of hosts). is free enough to make the following concession to his adversary ; “ I therefore readily acknowledge to you, that such passages of the Fathers as style Christ παντοκράτωρ, are not pertinently alledged to prove Him to be the *Jehovah* in the strict sense of that name, according to those Fathers.” Second Def. Query ii. p. 40, 41. But to come to the Revelation of God, my only Rule, I think I can see sufficient reasons there, for applying this title to Christ. For, 1. he *created* all things, *Joh.* i. 3. *Col.* i. 16. Which he did as his Father's Agent, or by commission and power derived from Him, as you may see

the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords." *Rev.*

i. 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, 18.—xxii. 16. xix. 16

" Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son,
that thy Son also may glorify Thee. As thou
hast

see in *Eph.* iii. 9. *Heb.* i. 2. — 2. God conferred upon our Lord *universal sovereignty* and dominion, as was intimated before. For thus saith the Scripture: *God hath appointed Him Heir of all things* (so that he is, in this respect also, fully and properly *παντοκράτωρ*) *Heb.* i. 2. *All power*, saith Christ, *is given unto Me, in heaven and in earth*, *Matth.* xxviii. 18. *All things are delivered unto Me of my Father*, *Matth.* xi. 27. (So *Luk.* x. 22.) *The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand*, *Joh.* iii. 35. (see chap. xiii. 3. and xvii. 2.) *God hath put all things under his feet, and given Him to be the Head over all things to the Church*, *Eph.* i. 22. (see *1 Cor.* xv. 27. *Heb.* ii. 8. applied from *Psal.* viii. 6.) *Christ is the Lord of all*, *Acts* x. 36. *Lord over all* (if it be meant of Him) *Rom.* x. 12. and consequently, *God over all*, chap. ix. 5. For, as was observed above, God has given Him to be *Head over all* to his Church. — 3. Lastly, though this seems to be included in the universal sovereignty before-mentioned, The Father hath appointed his Son to be supreme Judge at the last day. *The Father hath committed all Judgment to the Son*, *Joh.* v. 22. *He hath given him power over all flesh, and made him Lord both of the dead and of the living*, *Joh.* xvii. 2. *Rom.* xiv. 9. So that he will judge the world in righteousness by this Man whom he hath ordained, — even by Jesus of Nazareth, who is ordained of God to be judge of quick and dead, *Acts* xvii. 31. — x. 38, 42. And therefore, as we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ; so every one of us shall give account of himself to God, — namely to God the Judge of all, by the means of Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, *Rom.* xiv. 10, 12. — *Heb.* xii. 23, 24.

So that the matter appears now (appears to me at least) to be exceedingly clear and easy. Nor can I see
what

hast given him power over all flesh that he should give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, do thou glorify me with thine ownself, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. — All mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them: — Holy Father, keep through thine own name [or *power*] those whom thou hast given me, that they may be One, as we are: — That they all may be One, as thou Father art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in Unity, and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and that thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me: — For thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

John

what can fairly be objected to this account. This I am sure of, that I had no bias upon my mind, to incline me to seek for any thing but the truth, in the comparison which I have drawn up. There is no other way, that I know of, to come at the true Sense of Scripture, but by comparing it in this manner, one part with another. Nor is there any other Rule that we can depend upon, for leading us, to the true understanding of this great subject, but the Scripture. It was therefore, I think, a fatal error on both sides, in the late controversy upon it, to descend any lower than the Scripture. This alone, being fairly attended to, would have decided the point; and the controversy would have been rendered much shorter, as well as more instructive.

Joh. xvii. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 21, 22, 23, 24.

Finally, let us attend to the grand commission given by our Saviour to his Apostles, immediately before his ascension. "All Power is given to Me in Heaven and Earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all Nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things which I have commanded you. Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world, Amen." *Matth.* xxviii. 18, 19, 20.

These noble declarations I chose to give you in one view and at large, that you might form a full and just notion of our Saviour's super-eminent excellence, and discern the real grounds of your believing in Him as a divine Person, or as God: Who, as you observe from these accounts, had a glorious existence with his Father before the foundation of the world, and was then God with God: Who made the world, and all things therein: Who was promised to the world for many ages before his appearance in it: Who afterwards, in the fulness of time, came down from heaven, and took upon him the nature of Men, and was thereby and there-upon God manifest in the flesh, Emmanuel, God with us, dwelling (or tabernacled † among us) full of grace and truth, and exhibiting his glory to his disciples, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father. Who by his doctrine, disposition, example, and miraculous works, reflected the glory of the Father (his wisdom, his power, his sanctity, his benignity) upon our
O be-

† ἐσκηνοώσεν *Joh.* i 14.

benighted world. And finally, when this great Captain of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings, becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross, to make atonement for the sins of men; God, having raised him from the dead, exalted him to the highest dignity and authority at his own right hand in the heavens; granting him his request, which he made a little before he suffered, by glorifying him with the glory which he had with him before the existence of the world; and probably adding a still greater which he had not requested. In which glory he is to continue to the world's end; when, having judged men and angels, according to the appointment of his Father, he is to resign to him the mediatorial kingdom, that the Father (God blessed for ever) may from thenceforward be all in all, the One great Supreme, as he was from the beginning, without any Mediator; as there will then be no occasion for such a Mediator, or for any intervention of offices between God and Men.

In collecting these passages for your service, I have not wilfully overlooked any declarations that I judged to be to the present purpose; such as would set forth to you in a clear manner the superlative eminence and divinity of our blessed Lord, either in his pre-existent or subsequent state.

Make the best use of them you can, and believe with me, that the Saviour of mankind is supereminently, is inexpressibly, and even inconceivably great and glorious, as exhibited to our view in the *Gospel* only, without wanting, without accepting any additional honours, any super-erogatory tributes, from the Fathers, from the Councils, from the Schoolmen; (who, by the way, knew no
more

more of the matter, who *could* know no more of it, then we do ; and probably knew much less ;) or from any modern advocates of a cause built entirely upon Schoolmen, upon Councils, upon Fathers ; all of whom, tho' as I must charitably hope, without designing it, have more or less done disservice to Christianity, and been the means of checking its growth, and retarding its progress : Which otherwise might long before this time have prevailed more universally in the world, and brought over millions of human creatures, locked up in darkness and vice, to the obedience of Christ, and to the participation of the blessings of his glorious Gospel.

You see now, Sir, the difference between the sacred Scriptures and the Athanasian Creed ; the difference in style and language, as well as in sentiment and in the manner of instruction. There is a meanness and flatness in the latter, compared with the majesty and grandeur of the former. There seems to be also a certain peevishness and uncharitableness in the one, whereas the other abounds with candor, good-nature and benevolence. Call to your mind again the pettish negations (excuse my giving them that epithet) so frequently interwoven with the assertions in this creed. Negations and distinctions, unbecoming *Divinity* ; unless Divinity is to be considered only as a *science* ; an art of distinguishing, disputing, and dividing the world about notions. In which light, I suppose, your favourite Poet might consider it, when he said.

For modes of faith, let graceless zealots fight.

And let me once more remind you of the *exterminating sentences* in that creed. Compare them with the words of the blessed Jesus ; words mild, and merciful, and gracious ; and full of

that divine philanthropy which we would naturally expect from Him *who came into the world to save sinners*. I am charmed with these declarations of our dear Redeemer, directed to the unbelieving and unrepenting Jews. “ If I do not the *Works* of my Father (viz. *perform not unquestionable miracles, by his power and orāer,*) believe me not. But if I do, tho’ ye believe not *Me*, believe the *Works* *. — I am come a *Ligbi* into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me, should not abide in *darkness*. And if any man hear my words, and *believe not*, † *I judge him not*. For I came not to *judge* the world, but *save* the world ‡. — God so loved the world, that he gave his Only-begotten SON, that whosoever *believeth* in Him, should not *Perish*, but have *Everlasting Life*. For God sent not his Son into the world to *Condemn* the world, but that the world through Him might be *Saved*. He who *Believeth* on Him, is *Not* condemned. *This* is the condemnation, [*not the modest dissenting from certain modes of doctrine invented and obtruded by Men, without authority from God; but the just and only*

* Joh. x. 37. There is an appeal somewhat parallel to this in chap. xiv. 11. which is thus translated by Dr. Heylin; ‘ Believe in Me, because I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: if not for that reason, [at least] believe me upon account of the *Works* which I perform.’ *Theol. lect.* p. 357.

† *And believe not.*] The learned person mentioned in the foregoing note, renders the words, *and does not practise them*; assigning several good reasons for his so doing, as the authority of the *vulgate*, of all other *ancient versions*, and many of the most authentick *Greek Manuscripts*. See his note on the place, *Theol. lect.* p. 354.

‡ chap. xii. 46, 47.

only condemnation is,] that *Light* is come into the world, and men loved *Darkness* rather than *Light*, because their *DEEDS* were *EVIL* * .”

You observe again the difference, and that not only in language, but even in doctrine. The great *cause* of condemnation was obstinate unbelief; rejecting the Messiah; disregarding his miracles; despising his instructions; indulging evil habits; continuing in a wicked course of life. These men had *an EVIL HEART of unbelief*, that necessarily produced *evil Actions*. *THIS* is the condemnation, as our Lord here expressly tells us; and we neither want, nor can have, any higher or better authority upon this point, than his.

I am so much delighted with these declarations, that I chuse to leave them upon your mind and my own, without proceeding at this time to any farther remarks; which I shall dispatch (if I can) in another Letter that may soon follow.

* Chap. iii. 16, &c. Dr. Heylin's Note on verse 19. *Theol. lect.* p. 330.

L E T T E R

LETTER IV.

SIR,

THERE can be no great difficulty I think, in regard to the point which you occasionally touch upon towards the close of your Letter, if you will but recollect what it is that you profess to be your supreme *Rule of Faith*, and what the Church of England and all Protestant Churches do acknowledge as such. Our Church declares, in the strongest terms, That *whatsoever is not read in Holy Scripture, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed, as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation* *. So that you may be very well satisfied upon this head, and need be in no pain about it. Or if any difficulty should yet remain, I promise to consider it very particularly in another Letter, and therein to give you all the satisfaction in my power. At present I would go on with what I had in view at the close of my last, in answer to something you dropt in a former Letter; intending to indulge you with a little respite, before I call up your attention again to this or some other subject.

The

* Artic. vi.

The great misfortune is, as I have all along observed to you, that men, having been bred up in *systems*, and particular modes of doctrine, derived either from Fathers, or scholastic writers, or Churches, or leaders of a party in any province of theology, before they were sufficiently acquainted with the *bo'y Scriptures*, find it difficult to remove their prejudices, and know not how to part with notions which have taken such early possession of their minds. The effect is not to be wondered at ; and the case of many is certainly to be pitied. But this, I think, should suggest to us the wisdom of *beginning* with the Scriptures (as we are told Archbp. *Tillotson* * and several other excellent men have done, and still do, to their great advantage. Which regular and natural course of proceeding, would insensibly lead us into just notions of revelation ; instil into us the *temper* of the sacred Writings, together with their instructions ; convince us of the necessity of a *holy life* above all things ; and (which is of no small importance in the present case) prepare us to read human writers afterwards with more judgment, and less detriment.

Some few pious and good minds have happily disengaged themselves by degrees (for it cannot be done all at once) from the effects of early prejudice. I have met with many in conversations, and some in writings, who have given proofs of their success this way, either by totally surmounting these difficulties, or in good measure weakening their power. One in particular, a writer of considerable note, has occurred to me since I began the course of these papers. I think I can be pretty sure, from several apparent indications in his works, that he had been brought up in systems. But being a very pious, honest
and

* See his Life by Dr. Birch, p. 21.

and good man, thoroughly devoted to the *Bible*, above all the books in the world, he thought it his duty to examine things anew, and did examine them with care, and with a constant application, as he tells us, to Heaven, for direction and assistance to find out the truth. The effect was, that he saw some received positions to be untenable; for which reason he fairly gave them up, and therefore advised, or at least wished, that others would do the same; or however, that they would not insist upon any modes and peculiarities of belief, distinct from the *great doctrine of the Gospel*: Which, he was well satisfied, was the only thing necessary to salvation, as well as to the honour and peace of the Christian Church.

Since you have been so lately, as you say, *attacked upon this very interesting subject*, and may be so again, when you meet with a person of that *dogmatical turn*, I will endeavour to compose your mind a little, by giving you a few pertinent observations out of this learned Writer; which I do with the greater pleasure, and with less diffidence, not only as he was a person of great moderation, but as I am persuaded that he sought the truth in sincerity; and as I am well assured, that he *had spent many years of his life in diligent enquiries into the sacred doctrines of the Gospel, by a constant and laborious search of the holy Scriptures*. Which surely, with his good natural abilities, were sufficient to qualify him to be a very competent judge in this affair.

In the first place, he wishes all *honest enquirers after truth* upon religious subjects, having his eye particularly upon *this*, to *lay aside all other teachers, besides the meer Writers of the holy Scriptures*;

tures ; and that they would not take the sentiments or schemes either of elder or later writers, whether schoolmen or fathers, or divines of any party, for a perfect test of truth and of orthodoxy, where the sacred Scriptures alone would lead them into the greatest truth, and the highest orthodoxy.

For my own part, I look upon this as a most reasonable and honest wish, becoming a Divine, and a Christian. The man, it is well known, had good sense ; and I assure myself from all circumstances both in his character, and in his writings, that he had no guile or sinister views in what he proposes ; nothing in view but truth, and the honour of the sacred Scriptures. The proposal had been often made, but disregarded. It had been made by several learned men on each side of the question. I shall mention only two, and those even of our own times, and, what is more still, of the orthodox persuasion.

The *first* is the author of the *two Letters* in 1722, one to the Earl of Nottingham, the other to Mr. *Whiston*. This author, being desirous to avoid all perplexities and uncertainties (for those are his words) is for waving all searches into antiquity, and for confining the debate to Scripture alone. Could you think now that any reasonable objection could have been made to this ? Yet Dr. *Waterland*, who acknowledges this Gentleman's orthodoxy in the fullest terms, is not pleased with his proposal, and therefore says, that he is *narrowing his own bottom, and unwarily sapping the foundation on which he stands* ; adding, with regard to a particular part of the proposal (*viz.* that the merits of the cause should be left to be tried by undisputed texts, and not by those that have not been

perfectly settled to the satisfaction of both parties) that this, though the author, he owns, did not intend it, is *laying the weight of the dispute upon what least deserves it*; is *deserting our strong holds, and engaging the adversary upon unequal ground, &c.** Which, by the way, seems to me to be a plain acknowledgment, that the *Scripture alone* (as the Gentleman had proposed) will not bear the weight of the doctrine which hath been superadded to it by the ancients and their followers; though Dr. *Waterland*, I doubt not, would have said, that it was no superaddition, but only an explication.—— But to let that pass.

The *other* orthodox writer whom I intended to specify, is Dr. *Felton*, who preached the *Lady Moyer's Lectures* in 1728, 1729. In those Lectures, Sermon VIII. p. 423, he says, “For my own part, I do readily close with the demand, and am willing to put the whole controversy upon the foot of *Scripture only*.” The concession seems really ingenuous, and is the more remarkable in this Gentleman, as he was so intimate with Dr. *Waterland*; whose advice he had received about the management of his subject †, and of whose *defenses* he speaks with high approbation ‡; from one of which nevertheless you have seen the Defender's censure upon the author of the *two Letters*. Whether the learned Lecturer might think the Defender wrong in this particular (which might possibly be the case, though he acknowledges he had a *great deference for his judgment* §, I cannot take upon me to determine, nor will

* Pref. to *second defence*.

† Pref. p. 1. ‡ Lect. p. 447. § Pref. p. 1.

pretend even to surmise. I choose rather to lay before you, what he is pleased to say some pages after, in the same sermon, leaving you to judge. “ As long as the *creeds* are a guard
 “ and defence against the contrary doctrines,
 “ we cannot depart or vary from them, with-
 “ out departing from the *true Scripture-doctrine*
 “ of the Trinity: — and I suppose I may
 “ lay it down as an evident and necessary truth,
 “ that in this controversy we cannot depart
 “ from the *Albanasian*, without going into the
 “ *Arian*, or *Socinian* creed *.” I shall make
 no remarks myself, but shall be glad to have
 yours: And so I return to my more candid
 author; who, let me observe to you by the
 way, was no enemy to the creed here com-
 mended, as appears from what he hath said
 of it in the very Treatise which I have before
 me.

Amongst some general observations relating
 to this subject, he gives us these two, which
 I imagine you will judge to be very reasonable,
 and very just.

1. “ That no *particular explication* of the
 “ Scriptural doctrine of the Trinity, can be *ne-*
 “ *cessary to salvation.*” For which he offers this
 reason: “ Because, says he, though the doctrine
 “ itself of three personal characters which have
 “ communion in one Godhead, be clearly reveal-
 “ ed; yet the *modus* how they are one and how
 “ they are three, is not clearly and plainly re-
 “ vealed. And indeed (as he goes on) if this
 “ *modus* be revealed at all in Scripture, yet
 “ it is in so obscure a manner, that we can

P 2 “ come

“ come at it only by laborious reasonings, and
 “ a train of difficult consequences ; whereas all
 “ *necessary* articles are and must be *clear* and
 “ *plain* ; and if they are not contained in ex-
 “ press words, yet they must lie open and ob-
 “ vious to a natural and easy inference. —

“ 'Tis evident, as he observes farther, that
 “ Scripture hath more directly and expressly
 “ laid our *salvation* upon the special divine
 “ *characters* or *offices* which the Father, Son
 “ and Spirit sustain in the Bible, and upon the
 “ peculiar blessings which we derive from them,
 “ and the peculiar honours to be paid to them,
 “ rather than upon any nice *explication* of their
 “ intimate essence and union, their nature and
 “ difference ; and therefore such a nice explica-
 “ tion is not of necessity to salvation.

2. “ That no particular explication of this
 “ mystery is necessary to salvation, because the
 “ most pious, as well as the wisest and most
 “ learned Christians, have had very different
 “ sentiments on this subject, and gone into
 “ different schemes of explication ; and that in
 “ the several ages of Christianity, as well as in
 “ our present age.”

These *different schemes of explication* which
 the author mentions, are really in the present
 age, and have been in all former ages, the main
 ground of difference and dispute ; whereas if
 men had acquiesced in the *words of Scripture*,
 without launching out into *philosophical* specu-
 lations, or *metaphysical* and *abstracted* notions *,
 which

* Which, I suppose, drew that severe reflection from
 the Lord Bolingbroke's pen, viz. That it was matter of
 astonishment to him, how our learned Divines could take
 so much *silly pains* to establish *mystery* on *metaphysics*, &c.
 Lett. v. 15.

which has been a fault on both sides, and I think, equally complained of by both, one against the other; every man might have freely enjoyed the liberty of his own private sentiment, within his own breast, according to what should appear to him to be true, or at least probable, without danger (as I apprehend) either to his own soul, or to the peace of the Church of God. I may, for ought I know, be somewhat singular in my opinion about this matter; but I am free enough to produce it, as I cannot see any ill consequence that can well attend it, when it is rightly understood, and fairly treated. Now, to touch particularly upon one point, you will see what are my sentiments, and to what limits I confine them. The *Scripture-declarations*, which I laid before you in my last Letter, give me a most exalted idea of the Son of God in every view. I embrace him therefore as my Saviour, my Lord, and my God, in the highest sense, wherein any of those declarations can intend to represent him to my mind, as an object of my veneration, obedience and love. Is this sufficient? If not, what do you require farther? "An explicit declaration of your particular sentiments." In the first place, my friend, I conceive you have no right to demand this. In the next, your demand is precluded by the rule I have laid down; which turns, you see, upon a quite different supposition. But if you press me farther, either for information, or merely out of curiosity, or else with a view to draw me into a debate, by asking me, what is the meaning (you must intend, I suppose, the *precise* meaning) of Christ's being *God with God*, or any other the like sublime expressions; I would cut your question short, by saying in

two words, *I know not*. Nor indeed do I think it necessary to inquire any farther, about this or any other article that is not farther revealed. I will freely go as far as the Scripture will lead me, but will stop where it leaves me. If I should judge it proper to add any thing more, I would take Mr. *Dillon's* short method with unbelievers upon the subject of the resurrection *, applying some of his words, or at least of his sentiments, to the present article; I am not solicitous, either to know or to explain any thing in particular about this sublime subject. I am content with what God hath revealed. I concern not myself about *modus*, *identity*, *personality*, &c. Philosophy and metaphysics have nothing to do here. God hath said it: God is true: I believe his word: And that is sufficient. Upon this foundation, and this alone, I defy all the objections that *wit*, or *philosophy*, or *metaphysics*, or any human science can make, to unsettle me in my faith, or remove me from my hopes. And I apply this to the whole doctrine of the Trinity, I mean as set forth in the Scripture only, and not as drawn into refinements by any human writers.

Let us now go on with our author. Speaking in another place of the *eternal generation* and *consubstantial sonship* of the blessed Jesus, he ventures to say, " This doctrine is not clearly enough revealed in Scripture for us to
 " make it a *fundamental article* in any age,
 " and to damn all who don't receive it. I
 " cannot see evidence enough in the Word of
 " God to make the salvation of all mankind,
 " the poor and the ignorant, the labouring men,
 " &c. (even in such a day of knowledge as
 " this

“ this is) to depend on such a doctrine, which
 “ the most learned and pious Christians in all
 “ ages have confessed to be attended with so
 “ many difficulties, which after the labour and
 “ and study of near fourteen hundred Years,
 “ is so unconceivable in itself, and was at first
 “ so obscurely revealed.”

Again : “ ’Tis evident to me that the holy
 “ Scripture lays the stress of our salvation upon
 “ a belief that Christ is the *Messiah*,” [you see
 how naturally he falls into this observation
 upon an impartial research ;] “ the appointed
 “ all sufficient Saviour ; a trust in the proper
 “ atonement or sacrifice of Christ for the for-
 “ giveness of sins ; a dependence on his grace
 “ and Spirit for light and holiness, and a sub-
 “ mission to his government, much more than
 “ it does upon any precise and exact notions
 “ or hypotheses concerning his *divine* and his
 “ *human* nature, (and the conjunction of each)
 “ even though the union of the divine and the
 “ human nature in him are in my judgment
 “ necessary to render his salvation complet.
 [You observe the man’s modesty as well as
 piety in delivering his sentiments. He pro-
 “ ceeds.] Scripture teaches us to concern our-
 “ selves about regeneration and grace to be
 “ received from the *blessed Spirit*, more than
 “ about the *nature* and *essence* of that Spirit
 “ which regenerates us. It makes our eternal
 “ interest depend upon the glorious *characters*,
 “ *offices* and *operations* of the three Persons of
 “ the blessed *Trinity*, &c”, (to the same purpose
 as in a passage before-cited.) “ I must believe,
 “ that the great God will make merciful al-
 “ lowances to sincere souls for their different
 sentiments, or for their ignorance and darkness
 in

“ in so sublime and mysterious an article, which
 “ almost all parties allow to contain some un-
 “ knowables and unconceivables in it.”

Lastly, “ All our particular *illustrations* there-
 “ fore, or *clearer conceptions* of this sublime
 “ doctrine, which God at any time may have
 “ favoured us with, should be proposed to the
 “ christian world with great modesty, with an
 “ humble sense of our fallible natures, with a
 “ gentle address to the wise and to the un-
 “ wise, without imposing upon their judgments,
 “ or dictating to their faith, and with a zealous
 “ care to maintain all those necessary practi-
 “ cal regards to the *Holy Trinity*, which are
 “ of so much greater importance.

“ And if it be an unreasonable thing to
 “ dictate to our fellow-christians, and urge our
 “ particular sentiments on them in these my-
 “ sterious points, how much more culpable and
 “ domineering is it to establish any espe-
 “ cial form of human explication of this sacred
 “ doctrine as a *Test of Orthodoxy and Christia-*
 “ *nity!* How vain a presumption is it with
 “ a pretence of divine authority to impose mere
 “ human explications upon the consciences of
 “ men, and to forbid them all the sacred bles-
 “ sings of especial communion in the Gospel,
 “ unless they testify their assent to such a par-
 “ ticular *hypothesis* or scheme of explication,
 “ which the imposers confess to be human
 [Quere, whether all of them confess it?]
 “ and yet impose it in their own prescribed
 “ form of words.

“ The persons who are guilty of this un-
 “ charitable practice may consecrate their im-
 “ positions and their excommunications with
 “ holy names, and call them *pious zeal for*

“ the

“ the divinity of Christ, but I suspect it will be
 “ found in the great day to deserve no better a
 “ character than a *mistaken zeal* for the *honour*
 “ of Christ, mingled perhaps with zeal for the
 “ divinity of their own notions, which they
 “ had incorporated with the plain and express
 “ revelations of the Godhead of Jesus Christ
 “ our Lord.”

I will conclude the whole with a declaration of a very ancient Doctor of the Christian Church, which will confirm the sentiments of this modern Doctor, and shew, that it is sufficient to acquiesce in the general belief of the *Holy Trinity*, as revealed to us in *Scripture*, without descending to particular explications; though the good man himself, whose words I am going now to give you, has in some Parts of his pious and useful Treatise, descended to some particulars about which the *Scripture*, to its honour be it spoken, seems to be silent.

“ *Εἰς Θεὸς Πατὴρ, &c.* There is one God, the Father; one Lord, his only-begotten Son; one Holy Spirit the Comforter *. It is sufficient for us to know these things. But as to their particular nature, subsistence or personality †, forbear enquiring. Had the *Scripture* explained them, I would have given you an account of them. The *Scripture* being silent, I dare not attempt it. *In short*, it is sufficient for salvation, that we know (i. e. *believe in and acknowledge*, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; meaning, undoubtedly, as the *Scripture* sets them forth to us. *St Cyril's Catech.* xvi.

Q

Con-

* Παράκλητος, which also signifies a [*Instructor*,] *Encourager*, and *Advocate*.

Dr. Heylin's note on *St. John* xiv. 16.

† Ὑπόστασις,

Consider well, my dear Friend, of what hath been said, and the Lord give you a good understanding in all things; and that you may both perceive and know what things you ought to believe, and also may have grace and power to live according to them!

P O S T C R I P T.

SINCE this Examination was put to the press, a small treatise hath been published, bearing this title: *A serious and dispassionate Inquiry*, &c. printed for J. Shuckburgh in Fleet-street. The reader will find in it many Observations upon the *Athanasian Creed*, and upon *Presentments* for not reading it, which have escaped notice in the present Essay, and may help to clear the subject still farther; as may also the *third* Volume of Mr. Foxin's Remarks, which came out about the same time.

Erasmus confirms what Episcopus hath said about *Creeds*, and strengthens the whole with a very pertinent remark, which will destroy the validity of some modern defences: *Tot jam erant symbola, quot homines; nibilo melius bonæ fidei signum, quam cum in contractibus res multis ac verbosis syngraphis agitur; quæ cum ad excludendas captiones adhibeantur, quò circumspectius scriptæ sunt, hoc plus captionum solent ferè gignere*, &c. Annot. in *Matth.* xi.